

School of Theology at Claremont



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THE FIRST METHODIST SOCIETY IN AMERICA

OUTLINE OF AN HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Made by

Request of the Methodist Episcopal Commission on Priority

By

H. K. CARROLL, LL.D.

One of the Commissioners

IMPORTANT TO DELEGATES



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The First Methodist Society in America

WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT FORMED?

BY EMBURY OR STRAWBRIDGE?

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PUBLISHED FOR THE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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The First Methodist
Society in America

First Church of the
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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

IN BEHALF OF THE METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted May 29, 1912, on the basis of a memorial of the Baltimore Annual Conference, the following:

In response to the memorial of the Baltimore Conference respecting the sesquicentennial of American Methodism, the Committee on Itinerancy recommends the following:

WHEREAS, the time and place of the origin of American Methodism is in dispute, as between Sams Creek, Maryland, and New York City; and

WHEREAS, the sesquicentennial of that event is approaching, therefore

Resolved 1. That the General Conference appoint a Commission of seven members, at least three of whom shall come from the vicinity of New York, and three from the vicinity of Baltimore, and one at large, who, together with similar commissions from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church (if such shall be appointed) shall inquire carefully into and, if possible, determine whether the priority belongs to Maryland or to New York.

Resolved 2, That the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in conjunction with the other branches of Methodism in America, make provision for the proper observance of this greatest event in the religious life of the republic.

In accordance with this action the bishops appointed the following persons to serve as the Commission of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Rev. William V.

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Kelley, Rev. G. P. Eckman, Rev. J. S. Chadwick, Rev. John F. Goucher, Rev. C. W. Baldwin, Rev. E. L. Watson, and Rev. W. F. Conner.

Rev. G. P. Eckman resigned, and in the summer of 1915 Dr. H. K. Carroll was appointed to the vacancy. The minutes of the Commission give the facts as to its organization and meetings. Drs. Goucher and Eckman were requested to prepare papers on the origin of American Methodism, especially with reference to the question of priority. Subsequently, the Commission requested Dr. H. K. Carroll to prepare the paper that had been assigned to Dr. Eckman.

The Bishops at their meeting in November, 1915, adopted the following minute, which was later officially communicated to the Chairman of the Commission, Dr. Kelley, and was published in *The Christian Advocate of New York* in December:

ACTION OF THE BISHOPS

Inasmuch as serious objection has been made to the work of the Commission appointed to consider the place of the origin of American Methodism, as well as to the composition of the Commission, we recommend that the said Commission defer further action in the matter committed to them until the approaching General Conference can clear up the legal and practical questions involved.

The New York members thereupon took the action under consideration and reached without hesitation the conclusion that they must be guided by its recommendation. A paper was drawn up expressive of their views and when the Commission met in Baltimore, January 25, 1916, Dr. Chadwick moved that the Commission accept the advice of the Bishops. This

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motion was lost by a vote of four to two, Dr. Kelley being absent on account of illness. Then the New York representatives present filed their statement, to which the name of Dr. Kelley was added by his authority and the session ended. The statement was as follows:

A STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION CONCERNING THE ACTION OF THE BOARD OF BISHOPS

Dear Brethren:

The Board of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church having taken action advising that the work of this Commission be suspended until the approaching General Conference shall have had opportunity to "clear up the legal and practical questions involved," the undersigned, after taking counsel together, without knowledge of the attitude of other members, deem it expedient frankly to set forth, at the beginning of this session, their views on the matter of proceeding with the inquiry for which this Commission was appointed.

1. The action of the Bishops stated that "serious objection had been made to the work of the Commission" and to its composition. We do not know what communications the Bishops had before them, nor what these communications contained. But we must assume that whatever they were or by whomsoever they were presented they convinced the Bishops that it would be unwise for the Commission to proceed, and they therefore recommend that further action be deferred.

2. The action of the Bishops is, in effect, an impeachment of the fitness and competency of the Commission to make a fair and impartial historical inquiry and reach a decision that shall command respect.

3. The action of the Bishops has not only been communicated to the chairman of this Commission, but it has been published and is known to the general Methodist public. We cannot consent to sit as members of a Commission thus discredited in the eyes of the Church by a body second only

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to the General Conference in the respect and esteem of our Church.

4. As loyal Methodists we do not feel free to reject the advice of our Board of Bishops by whom this Commission was selected. Nor does it promise, in our judgment, any useful service to the cause of historical truth to spend further time in reaching a conclusion which our Methodist public is prepared to discount. The Commission is evidently regarded as being wrong in its method and partisan in its spirit, and as confronting "legal and practical questions" which the General Conference itself ought to settle. We were prepared to proceed with the work and fully expected to do so until the Board of Bishops intervened.

The situation is embarrassing, and we admit that the course we propose is not free from objection; but with the General Conference only three months away, with no necessity for immediate action, and with the resolution of the Board of Bishops calling a halt, our minds are clear as to our duty. We must decline to take any action as members of this Commission, except in considering and adopting a report to the General Conference appropriate to the circumstances.

With high respect,

WILLIAM V. KELLEY.
JAMES S. CHADWICK.
H. K. CARROLL.

(Signed by Dr. Chadwick on the written authority of Dr. Kelley.)

As the New York Commissioners felt constrained to withdraw, Dr. Carroll's paper, which, owing to the pressure of time, had not been fully committed to writing, was in deference to the action of the Bishops withheld. The next day the Baltimore members of the Commission, with Dr. Conner, went into session with the Commissioners of the two other Churches, and the paper prepared by Dr. Goucher was heard at

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length, and the fourteen Commissioners present proceeded to deliver judgment without hearing a word of New York's case. Of the fourteen who voted that the priority of Strawbridge was proved, at least ten were from Baltimore and vicinity, most of whom had participated in a celebration in the fall of 1914, at Sams Creek, of what was called the sesquicentennial of the beginning of Methodism in America, thus anticipating the decision for which the General Conference had provided, and its outcome—an authorized sesquicentennial observance.

The action of the General Conference requiring that at least three members of our Commission should be from New York and vicinity and three from Baltimore and vicinity was undoubtedly intended to secure full consideration of the case for each locality claiming priority. The New York Methodist Historical Society does not believe that a bi-partisan Commission is the kind of tribunal to settle an historical question like this, which must of necessity deny one claim in deciding for the other. Local feelings and prejudices are inevitably involved, and the exact value to be given to opposing pleas can hardly be estimated by those who have long held positive opinions on one side or the other.

In any event it is surely a fundamental principle of justice and fairness that no verdict rendered upon the statement of one party alone, the other side not having been presented by its advocates, can be accepted by a court of final authority.

How partisan feeling can blind the eyes of good men to an important fact on the other side is shown

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in the findings of the joint Commission, the first two of which are as follows:

1. That Philip Embury began to preach and formed a society in the city of New York some time during the year 1766.
2. That Robert Strawbridge came to Maryland and settled on Sams Creek, Frederick County, about 1761.

The findings utterly ignore the indubitable fact that Philip Embury came to New York in August, 1760, yet they do not omit to state the arrival of Robert Strawbridge "about 1761," as to which there is no proof. This is made one of the seven points in the verdict.

Therefore, we respectfully ask the General Conference to submit the question as to the priority of the beginnings of American Methodism to a competent and unbiased tribunal composed of expert historical teachers with representatives of the legal profession, which shall hold public sessions to hear advocates of both sides and all others who may have information to give.

As the announcement of the decision at Baltimore for Sams Creek has been widely published, and as the statement on which it was based is to go to the General Conference, the New York Methodist Historical Society deems it only fair and proper that the members of the General Conference shall also have before them an outline of the paper prepared, by appointment of the Commission, by Dr. H. K. Carroll, setting forth reasons for adhering to the overwhelming testimony of the Historical Statement in the Discipline, of the early pastors of the Sams Creek Society, of the long

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line of historians, of the lives and journals of the early itinerants, and of the repeated judgments of the General Conference itself.

GEORGE P. MAINS,
DAVID G. DOWNEY,
JAMES R. JOY,
Committee.

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE ORIGIN OF AMERICAN METHODISM?

Obviously the first question to be determined in the work of this Commission is, What was it appointed to do? According to the action of the General Conference at Minneapolis creating it, its function is to "inquire into" the subject of the "time and place of the origin of American Methodism" and "if possible, determine whether the priority belongs to Maryland or to New York." What is meant by the term "origin"? To what was it intended to apply? The Commission is to "determine whether the priority belongs to Maryland or to New York." "Priority" in what or of what? Evidently in "origin." Now it is a very interesting question as to what constitutes "origin." The ordinary meaning of this word is well known to us. It means rise or beginning—beginning of what? If the answer be, the rise or beginning of American Methodism, the question immediately occurs, What constitutes such a beginning, rise, or origin? Several answers are possible:

1. The holding of a class meeting may be regarded as a beginning. The class was generally the first step in organizing Methodism, in the days of Wesley, both in the British Isles and in America. Embury, a lay preacher, came from Ireland to New York in 1760 with eleven members of his Irish class, in much the same way that Brewster, likewise a layman, came with a company of Congregationalists, in 1620. The

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landing of the Mayflower's company on Plymouth Rock, the Congregational denomination counts as its American origin.

2. The establishing of Methodist services. This requires simply a place of meeting—which may be a barn, a chapel, a hall, a shed, or a room in a dwelling house—and a preacher or leader, with attendants, who may or may not be members. Did Strawbridge have such meetings at Sams Creek before Embury had them in New York? If so, is that fact to determine the question of priority? The paper read at the meeting of the Joint Commission bore the title, according to the minutes, "The first Preacher of Methodism in America." If that be the turning point of the controversy, Savannah, Georgia, has the first and highest claim, and John Wesley is the "first preacher," for he was there in 1736 preaching and meeting persons weekly for religious instruction. Wesley himself regarded it as one of the beginnings of Methodism. It was of this work that Whitefield said: "The good John Wesley has done in America is inexpressible." He had laid a foundation, said the great evangelist, that neither men nor devils could shake.¹ Moreover, it is certain that Embury was in New York in 1760 and there is a strong probability, amounting almost to moral certainty, that he preached on American soil that same year, long before Strawbridge left Ireland. (See Embury, *A Preacher and Class Leader*, p. 3).

3. Such religious work as results in conversions. If this be sufficient, the conversion of John Evans in

¹Ezra S. Tipple: Francis Asbury, *The Prophet of the Long Road*, pp 59, 60.

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Maryland, or of Mrs. Morrell in New York might, on proof of priority, settle the case.

4. The organization of a Methodist Church. John Wesley did not organize Methodist churches, nor did the early Methodist preachers in America. Converts were formed into societies and these looked to the Church of England for the ordinances. Strictly speaking, we had no Methodist churches in this country until the Conference of 1784, when our ecclesiastical organization was completed. Jesse Lee, in his History of the Methodists, speaking of the conditions prior to the Christmas Conference of 1784, when the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, says:

"We were only a religious society and not a Church, and any member of any Church, who would conform to our rules, and meet in class, had liberty to continue in his own Church." (p. 47.)

VIEWS OF JOHN WESLEY AND BRITISH METHODISM

5. The formation of a Methodist society. John Wesley, according to Jesse Lee's History of Methodism (pp. 11-13), and according to his own Ecclesiastical History, recognized four beginnings of English Methodism in England: 1st, At Oxford in 1729, when the Holy Club was formed; 2nd, at Savannah, Georgia, in 1736, when he met persons weekly for religious instruction; 3rd, at Fetter Lane, London, in 1738, the origin of the bands, when he began to meet with Moravians and others for religious exercises; 4th, in London, "in the latter end of 1739," when eight or ten persons, anxious for redemption, came together regularly with him. "This was the

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rise of the United Society," first in London and then in other places, said the Wesleys in the preface of the General Rules, which our Discipline and all Methodist Disciplines faithfully retain. The organization of this first Methodist society is universally recognized as the real epoch of Methodism, and Wesleyan Methodists observed the hundredth anniversary of the origin of the movement in 1839. That society was more than a class meeting, for the introduction to the General Rules goes on to explain that each society is divided into "smaller companies, called classes," with "about twelve persons in each class, one of whom is styled the leader." The "bands" were not unlike the classes, according to the rules given for them in 1744. Of course a society might, for a while, at least, consist of a single class.

VIEWS OF DR. ABEL STEVENS AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1860

In an article printed in *The Christian Advocate*, September 2, 1858, George C. M. Roberts, of Baltimore, suggested that 1860 be observed as the centenary of American Methodism, instead of the year which had been proposed—1866—on the ground that both Embury and Strawbridge had, as he believed, arrived in this country and begun their labors in that year. The editor, Dr. Abel Stevens, the brilliant historian of Methodism, insisted, in an appended note, that the question was, whether "a Methodist society was formed earlier than the date given in the introduction of the Discipline," and if so, when was it

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formed? He added: "Strawbridge might have preached continually and even baptized (though irregularly), but the true epoch of Methodism must be the first organization of societies." He urged Mr. Roberts to furnish proof on that specific point, confessing that while he would "feel uneasy at having the admitted epoch disproved," nevertheless if it could be disproved "it ought to be." The same view appears to have been taken by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1860, in its action on the Centenary of American Methodism, in which it was said that if the question were the origin of the Methodist Episcopal Church there would be no difficulty in fixing the date; "but as to the origin of American Methodism the testimony was not as conclusive" as might be desired. Without attempting to controvert the claims that Methodism was introduced in Maryland in 1760, the General Conference, in the report adopted, insisted that "it must nevertheless be admitted that the Society" "formed in New York" in 1766 "was the first association or organization of American Methodism." Evidently the General Conference agreed with the opinion of Dr. Abel Stevens.

If the question of priority as between New York and Maryland Methodism had not been raised; if there were no other claimant to the honor which from the beginning has been accorded to John Street Church, by unbroken official declaration and by the common agreement of nearly all our Methodist historians, it would not be necessary to be particular about definitions and interpretations. But since there

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is an aspirant to the crown which New York has worn from the beginning, a hundred and fifty years ago, we must have a clear, fair understanding as to what constitutes "origin."

It is stated by Dr. Murray in his sermon on the life of the Rev. Thomas Morrell, one of the early pastors of John Street Church, that Embury had a convert (Mr. Morrell's mother) in New York in 1760; indubitable proof is at hand that Embury brought to this country from Ireland eleven members of his Irish class, that they were together in New York City several years and that they left together for settlement at Camden. An argument¹ has been drawn from such facts as these and from traditions to show that meetings of these brethren continued to be held, though perhaps irregularly, and that Philip Embury, Barbara Heck and others never were backsliders. Against this argument there are no known facts of history to oppose. It is at least a reasonable deduction.

I think, therefore, that the formation of Methodist societies is the true epoch of American Methodism. This accords also with the statement of the Wesleys making the rise of the United Society in London the epoch of British Methodism. The beginnings at Oxford, at Savannah, and at Fetter Lane, were only so many steps toward the launching of the movement, corresponding to the origin of a ship. A beginning is made when the keel is laid; a second step is taken when the frame is set up; a third, when the planking

¹ See Dr. L. R. Streeter's pamphlet, *The Place of Methodism's Beginning in America*, 1914.

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is put on and the frame is enclosed. But the true epoch of the ship is when she is launched, and from the moment she floats her life is reckoned; just as birth is the epoch of a human being.

PART I. EVIDENCE OF THE PRIORITY OF EMBURY'S SOCIETY

As frequent references will be made to Pipe Creek, Sams Creek, and the Log-Meeting house, the scene of Strawbridge's labor in Frederick, now Carroll, county, Md., I insert here, by permission of The Christian Advocate, the map of the section made by Mrs. Bibbins to accompany her article on the Rise of Methodism in Maryland. I have never visited the localities, but have no reason to question the general accuracy of the map, simply modifying the title of it slightly.



THE BIRTHPLACE OF MARYLAND METHODISM

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EXPLANATIONS

Sams Creek flows into Pipe Creek. Sams Creek is also a village some three or four miles south of New Windsor. There are houses at Pipe Creek, but no village. Asbury was at Willis's house when he made his entry dated "Pipe Creek." The Methodist Protestants have a church at Pipe Creek, near the site of Strawbridge oak, on their Pipe Creek circuit. The New Windsor circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church includes with New Windsor the Stone chapel and Bethel. As early as 1774, Otterbein and Schwope, founders of the United Brethren Church, reported classes at Pipe Creek, Sams Creek, and Fredericktown. The minutes of meetings held in 1774 and 1775, a copy of which I have seen, state that the classes were prosperous. These societies long ago disappeared.

I. THE BEGINNING OF METHODISM IN NEW YORK

"The beginnings of Methodism in America belong to the high realms of religious romance." So says one of our episcopal historians,¹ and adds, "New York was the first conspicuous scene." It is a little difficult to invest the coming of Philip Embury and his company to these shores with very much romantic interest. Another historical writer, Bishop Simpson,² sees only the bone of a literal fact. In North America, he says, "the rise of Methodism was wholly incidental." So was the conversion of Paul; but Paul did not speak of it quite so prosaically. He magnified the Provi-

¹ Hurst's History of Methodism. Vol. iv, p. 1.

² Simpson's A Hundred Years of Methodism.

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dence in it, and made the story of that journey to Damascus immortal. Still another author says "the first springing of Methodism in America was so thoroughly a matter of Providence that even the date is uncertain."¹ And yet God, who does not despise dates, brings all things to pass in the fullness of time, and the coming to America of Embury and his class was one of the divinely-ordered events of God's kingdom. The Old World did not longer need them; the new world did. If their sailing had been delayed a few years they probably would not have come at all. They came opportunely, that is to say, providentially, to prepare for the birth of a nation out of the throes of the Revolutionary War. If it is true that God never hurries, it is equally true that he is never slack as men count slackness.

The Emburys and the Hecks doubtless had no other purpose in coming than to find a more adequate subsistence in the new country with its vast spaces. They expected to manufacture linen; they never dreamed they were to begin here a great religious movement. Such a thing was not in their thought; but it must have been in God's thought. It was incidental to them, but the incidental may also be the providential, and Bishop Hurst may have some justification, after all, for placing it in the "high realms of religious romance." Poets love the upper atmosphere, but none have done for the Palatines what Longfellow did for the Pilgrims,

"O strong hearts and true, not one went back on the
Mayflower."

¹ DuBose's *Francis Asbury*, p. 49.

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But time may yet atone for the neglect, for it is true also of the Irish immigrants that not one went back.

2. EMBURY IN IRELAND

The known facts about Philip Embury, while not abundant, are yet sufficient to give a fair outline of his life, character, and work. He was a Palatine, born in Ballingran, Ireland, in 1728, baptized the same year, educated by Philip Guier and in an English school, and apprenticed to a carpenter. On Christmas, 1752, according to his own written statement, he was converted, and became shortly after a class-leader and then a local preacher. He was recommended for the itinerancy in 1758 and was put on Wesley's reserve list to await a vacancy. The same year he married Miss Margaret Switzer. The increase of rents on the Southwell estate on which most of the Palatines lived, induced him and his wife and a considerable number of other German settlers to seek better conditions in America. They, therefore, embarked on the ship *Perry* at Limerick, in June, 1760, and nine weeks later arrived in New York (August 10), the *New York Mercury* of August 18, referring to some incidents of the voyage and to the coming of "a number of Germans, the fathers of many of them having settled there (in Ireland) in 1710."

3. EMBURY AND HIS CLASS

The company consisted of Philip Embury and wife, his brothers Peter and David and their wives, Paul and Barbara Heck, Jacob Dulmage and his wife, their son Jacob, and Valentine Tetler. These twelve had

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constituted a class at Ballingran and came to America by ship in much the same way as the Scrooby-Leyden Congregational Church had come to Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts, in 1620. The names of sixteen others, who came at the same time, neighbors, friends, or relatives, are given. The incident of Embury's sermon on the ship at the port of departure is given in Farrar's *History of Limerick*, which also identifies the company. Wesley's *Journal* of July 9, 1760, speaks of the Palatine converts of Ballingran as having sailed, and further confirmation of the arrival in America, if it were needed, is found in the fact that "Philip Embury, Schoolmaster," advertised in a New York paper, the *Gazette*, in March and April, 1761, for pupils.¹ An application for a patent of land, addressed to the Governor of New York, February 1, 1763, and signed by Philip Embury, three of his brothers, the Dulmages, Paul Heck, and others, recites that they arrived from Ireland "about two and a half years ago." This government document gives unimpeachable corroborative and conclusive testimony as to the arrival of Embury and his company in the middle of 1760; it also shows that most of the company came to engage in linen manufacture, and that all except one of the twenty-five petitioners were members of the Church of England.²

4. EMBURY A PREACHER AND CLASS-LEADER

Philip Embury came with his carpenter tools to ply his trade, until he could start the linen business, bringing his Bible incidentally; but the Bible. and not

¹ Atkinson's *Beginnings*, etc., p. 224.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

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the hammer, or the shuttle, was the instrument of real importance. He opened the Book on the deck of the ship at Limerick,¹ and gave of its riches to those who stood on the dock and saw him sail away. This is history. If nothing happened on the ship to rob him of his faith—and the sea is not so perilous to faith as the land—he must have had it still when he disembarked in America, and yet, though the chronicle of departure and arrival is clear and conclusive, it is silent as to his meetings with his class and his sermons at sea and ashore. It is not reasonable to suppose that he stopped short in his preaching with the discourse at the dock in Limerick and preached no more till the call of Barbara Heck came. History neither asserts nor denies; but the antecedent facts involve the inference that meetings and preaching continued on American soil, at least for a while, just as growth follows germination.

5. WHAT DID HE DO IN AMERICA?

Stevens in his great history reaches this conclusion. He says: "It can hardly be doubted that on arriving in New York, Embury, a class-leader and also a local preacher in Ireland, attempted some religious care of the few Methodists who accompanied him." Other historians agree with him, and a recent writer² who has gone into this matter very thoroughly makes it seem quite probable that the class was kept intact through the six years following the arrival in America:

¹ Farrar's History of Limerick, quoted by Stevens, in his History, Vol. I, p. 51. Also "The Irish Evangelist" of 1860.

² Dr. Lewis R. Streeter, *The Place of Methodism's Beginning in America*, 1914, pp. 26-39.

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that it was not disbanded and that its members did not backslide. Certainly Philip Embury and his wife and Barbara Heck had not grown cold in the faith, as Atkinson, Streeter, and others have made plain.

Dr. Streeter supposes Mrs. Catherine Morrell to have been one of the first fruits of these meetings, basing this claim on Dr. Nicholas Murray's careful statement that she was converted in 1760 "under the preaching of a Mr. Embury" and became one of the first members of his society, and also on an entry in her son's Journal.¹ He also refers to the statement that Methodism began in New York under Embury in 1763, which appears on the title page of a quarto book published in 1824, by W. and P. C. Smith in New York, and sold by the book agents and others for over thirty years. He brings forward another consideration in the fact that the Ballingran class were signers of the petition for government lands. This supports the inference that they were closely united both in things spiritual and in things temporal. Moreover, he contends that there is nothing to show that any of them had backslidden, and points to the fact that most of them (one had died) were among the first members of the society organized by Embury, and that they helped to secure the rigging loft and later joined in the erection of Wesley Chapel. He

¹ Dr. Murray was a Presbyterian pastor in Elizabeth, N. J., and a neighbor and friend of Rev. Thomas Morrell, son of Mrs. Morrell, and one of the early pastors of John Street Church in New York. Dr. Murray's sermon was preached and published in 1838. The statement in Morrell's Journal, which is still in manuscript, is as follows: "It was about the year 1760 she [his mother] was converted to God, and when Mr. Emery [Embury], the first Methodist preacher came over, she went to hear him and was among the first members who joined his society and consequently among the first Methodists in America."

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recapitulates substantially as follows: Embury and his class in fellowship emigrated in 1760; continued in fellowship the succeeding six years; in fellowship became a part of the society organized in 1766; and still in fellowship hired, with others, the rigging loft, and helped build Wesley chapel.

This is quite probable; and the argument that the class was equivalent to and might be regarded as a society is worthy of consideration; but the energetic action of Barbara Heck at the card-playing scene¹ in breaking up the game, destroying the cards and rebuking the players, and her call on Embury to preach "or we will all go to hell together," imply a spiritual condition that, while not dead or hopeless, was alarming. Then, according to the received account, Embury preached an awakening sermon which was attended and followed by revived interest and then actual conversions. There is no evidence to show that this was Embury's first sermon in America. The probability is that he preached immediately after his arrival in New York; though it cannot be positively asserted that he did. However, the question of the priority of New York Methodism does not rest on this point. As between the probabilities as to the date of the first sermon in America by Strawbridge and the first sermon by Embury the weight of the inference is entirely with Embury, for, according to the conclusions of the three Irish authorities on Strawbridge

¹The account given by John Lawrence, who was one of the players and who afterward married the widow of Philip Embury, was to the effect that Mrs. Heck, finding a company playing in the kitchen, seized and burned the cards, rebuked the players, and went out and found Embury and urged him to preach.

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in Ireland he did not leave Ireland until 1765 or 1766.¹

Whatever Embury may have done immediately after his arrival in America, it would appear that he was not preaching at the time of the card-scene in 1766 and probably had not been preaching for a considerable period. The call of Barbara Heck, from which is generally reckoned the first springing of Methodism in America, was clearly the beginning of the revival of Methodist activity, which almost immediately resulted in the formation of the first Methodist society in America. Jesse Lee, the author of the earliest History of American Methodism but one, that of Bourne, gives an independent account of the beginnings of Methodism in New York, evidently drawn from New York sources of information.

6. JESSE LEE'S TESTIMONY AS TO THE BEGINNING IN 1766

Lee was a Southern man, born in Virginia in 1758, converted in boyhood; he preached his first sermon in 1779, and entered the itinerancy in 1782. The first seven years of his ministry he spent in Virginia and then became the apostle of Methodism in New England. In October, 1799, he became pastor of Wesley Chapel in New York, continuing in that relation until March, 1801. Having formed the habit of systematic journal-keeping he gathered useful information wherever he went and wrote it down.² His journal

¹ Crook, Crookshank, Shillington.

² His History was drawn from official sources, from his own travels and observations and though it has some blemishes, it is of great value. Bishop McTyeire calls him the father of American Methodist History. Asbury said it was better than he expected and found fault only with the reference to his own retirement in Delaware.

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contains an entry in New York made early in 1801, giving an account of the origin of Methodism in that city, which it is interesting to compare with the statement covering the same subject in his History published nine years later. In the latter he opens the second chapter, which covers the period "from the beginning of the first society in New York in 1766 to the first Conference which was held in America in 1773," as follows:

(1) Previous to the year 1766 some of the members of the Methodist Society in Europe, settled in the United States (then British colonies), but were scattered about as sheep, having neither fold nor shepherd. (2) In the beginning of the year 1766 the first permanent Methodist society was formed in the city of New York. (3) Mr. Philip Embury, an Irishman, began to hold meetings in his own house and to sing and pray with as many as would assemble with him. (4) Soon after that, he collected and joined a few of them together in society, chiefly of his own countrymen. (5) In about three months after, Mr. White and Mr. Sause, from Dublin, joined with them.

I have numbered the sentences in the foregoing paragraph for convenience of reference.

They then rented an empty room in their neighborhood adjoining the barracks, in which they held their meetings for a season; yet but few thought it worth while to assemble with them in so contemptible a place. Some time after that, Captain Thomas Webb, barrack-master at Albany, found them out, and preached among them in his regimentals. The novelty of a man preaching in a scarlet coat, soon brought numbers to hear, more than the room could contain. Some more of the inhabitants joining the society, they united and hired a rigging-loft to meet in that would contain a large congregation. There Mr. Embury used to exhort and preach frequently.

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There are still a few persons living in New York (the Emburys, Hecks, and others had removed to Ashgrove, N. Y.) who formerly met with the society in the rigging loft, and are pleased at the recollection of what the Lord did for them in their little society, when they were weak and ignorant in the things of religion; but were united in Christian love and fellowship, and were willing to be despised for the sake of their Lord and Master.

This simple, direct account seems very clear and easy to be understood. The facts were, of course, obtained at first-hand, and that too from persons who had participated in the rigging-loft meetings. If there were a few living in 1810, when the History appeared who had met in the rigging-loft, there must have been more in 1801 when the historical item in Lee's Journal was written. The Emburys and Hecks and Webb, the chief figures in the events described, were not there; but there were others who had known the facts from the beginning and who were available as living witnesses to answer Lee's questions, tell what they knew, and correct and confirm one another.

7. MEANING OF LEE'S STATEMENT

The use of the word "permanent" naturally suggests the possibility of a society or societies which had not continued; but probably it was only intended to affirm that the New York society was fully organized so as to develop strength and power of growth and make history. The previous sentence seems to exclude the idea that there had been a society or societies which had proved to be only temporary.

The positive statement that this first Methodist society was organized in the beginning of the year

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1766, which appears also in Lee's Journal, is not supported by any other known writer. All historians and writers agree in assigning the epochal event in October, or "the latter part" of 1766, and a reasonable interpretation of sentences 4 and 5 brings Lee also into harmony with them. Sentence numbered 4 says that "soon after" Embury began his meetings for singing and prayer, he "joined a few of them in society," and sentence numbered 5 continues, "In about three months after, Mr. White and Mr. Sause, from Dublin, joined with them." Now, it is quite certain that White and Sause did not arrive from Ireland until the close of 1766. "T. T.'s" famous letter says they came about three months after the society was formed. So that according to sentences 4 and 5 of Lee's account, the society was formed in October, 1766.

How then can the second sentence, positively stating that the society was organized in the "*beginning* of the year 1766," be explained? It is the same, excepting the word *permanent*, as Lee wrote in his Journal in 1801.¹ (See latter in footnote for comparison.) The

¹ Entry in Lee's Journal, quoted by Atkinson, *The Beginnings*, etc., pp. 46, 47.

"I will here set down an account of the beginning of Methodism in the City of New York, which was the first society formed in the United States. The society was formed by Philip Embury, from Ireland, in the beginning of the year 1766, when a few of his own countrymen were joined together with him. He exhorted and prayed with them, and spoke to them about the state of their souls. After a short time some of the inhabitants of New York joined with them. Then they hired a sail-loft, in which they met, and Mr. Embury used to exhort, preach, etc. Captain Webb, an officer in the British Army, came amongst them, and was much engaged in religion and preached frequently. After some time they purchased a lot of ground in John Street, on which they built a church, in the year 1768; and on the 30th day of October, in the same year, the church was opened for divine worship; and Mr. Embury preached the dedication sermon. It is now a little upward of thirty-two years since our society had a house of worship in this place, and they have been increasing and multiplying ever since."

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Journal account is consistent throughout; but that given in the History is contradictory. The only explanation I can suggest is that Lee may have supposed that White and Sause came over much earlier in 1766.

Lee makes no mention of the card-playing incident and Barbara Heck's call upon Embury to preach. Nothing he says either in his Journal or History is inconsistent with the oft-repeated tradition; but his statements are in harmony with the view of Dr. Streeter and others that the Bellingran class had not been disbanded, and that early in 1766, perhaps in 1765, Embury was meeting with his little company to sing, pray, exhort, and talk with them about their souls. At first only his own countrymen attended these meetings; "after a short time" others came in.

8. THE CLEAR TESTIMONY OF THE TAYLOR LETTER¹

Accepting the interpretation, which the time of the arrival of White and Sause seems to require, we find that the famous "T. T." letter goes far to confirm it. This letter of Thomas Taylor, an Englishman, is of high historical value. It was written from New York April 11, 1768, to Mr. Wesley. Mr. Taylor had arrived in New York in October, 1767, only a year after the formation of Embury's society. On his arrival he had sought out Embury, and was, therefore, not only close to the origin of things, but also to the originator. Undoubtedly he got the information which his letter was written to impart from Embury. He has been convicted of an incidental error as to the last visit of Whitefield to New York; but one may

¹ Published in full by Seaman, Wakeley, and others.

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approach his statements as to the origin of American Methodism with great confidence.

Taylor undertakes to give some account of the state of religion in New York "eighteen months ago when it pleased God to stir up Mr. Embury to employ his talent (which for several years had been hid, as it were, in a napkin) by calling sinners to repentance and exhorting believers to "let their light shine before men." He adds that "a few were soon collected together and joined into a little society, chiefly his own countrymen." For the first four months there were few hearers, but Captain Webb came and the novelty of his appearance in his regimentals and of the doctrine he preached attracted many. Embury, he says, had formed two classes, one of men and one of women, but had not met the society apart from the congregation.

9. TAYLOR'S LETTER IN HARMONY WITH THE STATEMENT IN THE DISCIPLINE

This clear, definite statement, written from knowledge obtained at first hand and close to the beginning, bears the impress of truth, and leads inevitably to the conclusion that though a Methodist preacher and leader was unquestionably in New York with the members of his class and probably met them in class and perhaps preached a few times, the real epoch of Methodism in New York and America was the formation of the society in 1766. This agrees with the Asbury statement in the Discipline and with that of most of our historians.

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The events following the formation of the society are supported by abundant testimony. The Taylor letter carries the history down to the inception of the building enterprise and to within six months of its dedication. Embury, Heck, and Webb each had a large part in it; and the lease of the lot on John Street, the deed of purchase, the subscription list, with facsimiles of the subscribers' names, the manner in which the furnishings were procured, are all matter of clear record. The dedication of the chapel took place on October 30, 1768, about two years after the formation of the society.

10. THE MOVEMENTS OF EMBURY FULLY PROVED

We have an outline of the life and work of Philip Embury that is complete, consistent, and firmly established by documentary evidence and corroborative proof which cannot be shaken. We do not have to depend upon tradition, or inference, or probability for any of the important facts and dates that enter into the coming of Embury to New York, the formation of the New York society, or the erection and dedication of Wesley Chapel. Even the card-playing episode, the courageous rebuke by Barbara Heck, and her insistent call upon Philip Embury to exercise his office as a local preacher do not depend wholly upon tradition. The story is supported by a statement which has never been questioned that this illustrious woman herself wrote about it to a friend in Ballingran. The Ruckles treasured it,¹ and one of them

¹ Crook, in his *Ireland and the American Centenary* says, "old Mrs. Ruckle" told him she had often read it.

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subsequently brought it to the United States and took it with him to Ohio, leaving it when he died to a daughter who remembered it, but stated that it had somehow disappeared. Mr. John Lawrence, who was one of the card party, and who married the widow of Philip Embury, also supported the account,¹ also Peter Parks, whose mother and grandmother worshiped in the upper room in Barracks Street.² The story was related at the dedication of the second John Street Church, in 1818, by Nathan Bangs.³

This story is not at all necessary to prove the case for Philip Embury, the society he formed and the chapel he built and dedicated in New York City.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE DISCIPLINE FOR EMBURY

Nor is the historical statement of the Discipline essential to the case, though it was the earliest written account of the origin of American Methodism. Its significance and value lie in the fact that it was the first published history of the beginnings of the Wesleyan movement in the new world; that it was probably written with the approval, if not the help, of Bishop Coke, by Bishop Asbury, who also revised it; that its testimony from the beginning until now has asserted unvaryingly the priority of John Street Church; that this testimony is in exact accord with that of Bishop Asbury's farewell address to the General Conference of 1816, his last words to the Church.

The first statement was in the Discipline of 1787,

¹ See Appendix A of Seaman's Annals.

² Ibid.

³ See Atkinson, *The Beginnings*, etc., pp. 50, 51, 52.

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and ran as follows, taking simply the sentences applying to Embury, Webb, and Strawbridge:

About twenty years ago, Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland, began to preach in the City of New York and formed a society of his own countrymen and the citizens. About the same time Robert Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick county, in the State of Maryland, and preaching there, formed some societies.

In 1791-2 these sentences appeared in the following more definite form:

In the latter end of the year 1766, Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland, began to preach in the City of New York and formed a society of his own countrymen and the citizens. In the same year Thomas Webb preached in a hired room near the barracks and in the year 1767 the rigging-house was occupied. About the same time Robert Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick county, Maryland, and preaching there formed some societies.

These sentences appear also in our latest Discipline, that of 1912, without material change, as follows:

In the year 1766, Philip Embury, a Wesleyan local preacher from Ireland, began to preach in New York City and formed a society, now the John Street Church. Another local preacher, Thomas Webb, Captain in the British Army, soon joined him and also preached in the City of New York and its vicinity. About the same time, Robert Strawbridge, from Ireland, settled in Frederick county, Maryland, preaching there and forming societies.

So from the first publication in the Discipline to the latest, covering nearly a century and a quarter, the testimony of this official book to the priority of Embury's society has not varied as to the fact.

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12. ASBURY'S WITNESS FOR EMBURY

More than that, Asbury's statements in his Journal, in his letters, and in his farewell address to the General Conference of 1816, are in harmony with the Disciplinary statement, save only the Pipe Creek entry of May 1, 1801, which says, "Here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland—and America."¹ The last two words are in direct contradiction to all that Asbury wrote before and after that date. If it be assumed that he actually wrote these two words or approved the addition of them by his amanuensis, it is necessary to assume that he consciously bore false witness in the Historical Statement to the end of his days; that in his letter to Rev. Stith Mead, dated Little York, Pa., July 30, 1807, he deliberately robbed Maryland of its crown of priority, and that in his farewell address to the General Conference of 1816, written on "the River Santee, 70 miles from Charleston, South Carolina, January 8, 1816," he once more and finally falsified history and wronged the memory of Strawbridge and made himself responsible for a deliberate misstatement. In this address, intended to be read to the General Conference, and was so read, and which has recently been published for the first time, he says:

Only recollect as far as your observation or information will go what God hath done by us in Europe and America, in about seventy years in Europe and *less than fifty years in America*, and what wonderful things he may do for us and our successors, etc.

The words "less than fifty years in America," which

¹ Tipple's Heart of Asbury's Journal.

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I have italicised, are direct and definite and unmistakably declare that the epoch of American Methodism was in 1766, pointing unerringly to the organization of Embury's society in 1766. "Less than fifty years" from 1816 could not go back of 1766, and the advocates of the priority of Strawbridge, basing their claim chiefly on Asbury, assert that he was before Embury in his Pipe Creek work several years.

The only possible explanation is that Asbury never meant to assert the priority of the Pipe Creek society, except in Maryland; or that if he did, he afterward was convinced that it was a mistake, which he never afterward repeated. For fuller discussion of Asbury's statements, see Part II, pp. 63ff.

13. THE DECLARATIONS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FOR EMBURY

It is also a significant fact that all the deliverances of our General Conference have been in harmony with the declaration of Historical Statement in the Discipline and the letters and farewell address of Asbury.

Our supreme tribunal fixed the centenary of American Methodism for 1866 in agreement with it and declared in 1860, in answer to a Baltimore memorial asking that another year be named, that whatever may be claimed for Maryland Methodism "it must nevertheless be admitted that the society above mentioned in New York was the *first association or organization of American Methodism.*"¹

¹ The italics are mine. The action of the General Conference of 1864 was in harmony with that of 1860.

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Now let us consider the long, almost unbroken line of testimony given by Methodist historians and leaders and by itinerants contemporaneous with Embury, Strawbridge, and Asbury.

14. AMERICAN HISTORIANS AND LEADERS WHO ASSERT PRIORITY FOR EMBURY'S SOCIETY¹

1. Bishop Francis Asbury, in the Historical Statement of the Discipline, in his Journal, in his letter to Stith Mead, and in his farewell address to the General Conference of 1816.

2. Rev. Jesse Lee, in his Journal in 1801 and in his History of 1810, the statement in his History having been seen, read, and not criticized by Asbury.

3. Mr. George Bourne, of Baltimore, in the oldest history of American Methodism, published in 1807, who declared that "the most accurate research" convinced him that Embury's Society was "at least nine or twelve months previous" to Strawbridge's society. See also Part II, pp. 83ff.

4. Rev. Jonathan Crowther, "for more than twenty-six years a traveling preacher," in *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism*, published in 1813, who says American Methodism began in New York.

5. W. and P. C. Smith, in *A Short Historical Account of the Early Society of Methodists in the City of New York*, published in New York in 1824, and sold for years by the Methodist Book Concern. They declare Methodism was established in 1763, "through

¹ This is not presented as an exhaustive list. It might be further extended, but it is sufficiently comprehensive.

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the means of Philip Embury." See also Part II, p. 87.

6. Rev. Amos Binney, of Theological Compend fame, who in a diminutive tract, entitled, *The History of Methodism in Miniature from 1729 to 1829*,¹ published in Taunton, Massachusetts, in 1829, says the first society in America was formed in New York, in 1766, by Philip Embury.

7. A. G. Meacham, in his *Compendious History of the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Church*, both in Europe and America, 1835, says the first Methodist Church in America was formed in New York City in 1766.

8. Rev. Nathan Bangs, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1839, says Wesley Chapel, New York, was the "first meeting-house ever erected by a Methodist congregation in America," and that while Embury was laying spiritual foundations in New York, Strawbridge "came over" from Ireland, settled in Maryland, began to preach "and very soon a society was collected."

9. Rev. Leroy M. Lee, in his *Life and Times of Jesse Lee*, 1848, says the first Methodist society was formed in New York in 1766, and that "within a very short time" thereafter, Strawbridge settled in Maryland and formed a society near Pipe Creek.

10. Rev. J. B. Wakeley, in his *Lost Chapters*, 1858, assigns to Embury the honor of "preaching the first Methodist sermon, forming the first Methodist society, erecting the first Methodist house of worship, and preaching the first dedication sermon of the first

¹ Copy in possession of Bishop J. W. Hamilton.

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Methodist house of worship consecrated to God in this New World."

11. Rev. Abel Stevens, Methodism's greatest historian, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1867, says, "To Embury unquestionably belongs chronological precedence by a few months as the founder of American Methodism." He bears the same testimony in his *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs*, 1863, his *Compendious History of American Methodism*, 1868, and his *Centenary of American Methodism*, 1866.

12. Rev. T. H. Colhouer, in his *Non-Episcopal Methodism*, 1869, says Embury began in New York in 1766 and Strawbridge in Maryland about the same time.

13. Bishop Matthew Simpson, in article on the Methodist Episcopal Church, in his *Cyclopedia of Methodism*, 1880, gives precedence to Embury.

14. Rev. P. Douglas Gorrie, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States*, 1881, says the work in Maryland began at about the same time as that in New York.

15. Rev. Ancel Bassett, in his *Concise History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1882, says the two first societies, one in New York and the other in Maryland, were formed at about the same time.

16. Rev. John W. Boswell, in his *Short History of Methodism*, Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1901, says Embury held service in New York in 1766, and that "this was the first of the kind in the New World."

17. Rev. Samuel A. Seamans, in his *Annals of New*

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York Methodism, 1892, gives abundant evidence of the priority of Embury's Society.

18. Professor George L. Curtiss, Chair of Historical Theology, DePauw University, in his *Manual of Methodist Episcopal Church History*, 1893, speaks of two possible centers of American Methodism: Maryland, through Strawbridge, and New York, through Embury. As no dates concerning the log meeting-house can be determined and "no special work resulted from it, the historian can only mention it as one of the possible centers of American Methodism. The other center about which there can be no mistake as to dates or facts was in New York."

19. Dr. Gross Alexander, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1894, says, "Methodism planted itself as if by prophetic instinct simultaneously in two places, one of them in the South and one of them in the North."

20. Dr. John Atkinson, in his *Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America*, 1896, a monument of diligent research, elaborate array of facts and critical analysis, established the priority of Embury's Society.

21. Dr. James M. Buckley, in his *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1896, says, Atkinson "exhaustively discusses this question (priority), furnishing convincing proof that American Methodism began in New York."

22. Bishop John F. Hurst, in his *History of Methodism*, 1903, accepts Crook's statement that Strawbridge probably left Ireland in 1766 and says that "the first Methodist sermon in America of which we have

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anything like a definite account was preached in a private dwelling in New York early in 1766."

23. Professor John Alfred Faulkner, of Drew Theological Seminary, in his *The Methodists*, 1903, says the question as to who first established Methodism in America "has been set at rest by the invaluable researches of Atkinson, whose conclusion is endorsed by Buckley."

24. Rev. James W. Lee, a Southern Methodist author, Bishop N. Luccock and Professor James M. Dixon, in their *Illustrated History of Methodism*, 1905, say there is no "convincing evidence" that Strawbridge "was in Maryland earlier than 1766," and that Asbury's Pipe Creek entry is inconclusive.

15. ENGLISH AND IRISH HISTORIANS WHO DECLARE THE PRIORITY OF EMBURY

25. Rev. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, himself the first Methodist who preached in America, gave precedence in his ecclesiastical history to Embury, and in his *Journal*, August 1, 1769, speaking of the Wesleyan Conference at Leeds, he said: "On Thursday, I mentioned the case of our brethren in New York, who had built the first Methodist preaching house in America and were in great want of money and much more of preachers."

26. Bishop Coke and Henry Moore, in their *Life of Mr. Wesley*, 1792, speak first of the work of Embury and then of the work of Strawbridge, and say that the New York chapel "was the first chapel in Mr. Wesley's connection in America."

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27. Rev. Joseph Benson,¹ the celebrated commentator, in his *Apology for the People Called Methodists*, London, 1801, puts Embury first and Strawbridge at "about the same time."

28. Rev. William Arthur, author of the *Tongue of Fire*, in a book on the *Life and Labors of Rev. Thomas Coke*, writing of Embury's work in New York in 1766, says, "Such was the humble origin of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States."

29. J. W. Etheridge, Ph.D., in his *Life of Thomas Coke*, declares that Strawbridge began his work at about the same time as Embury entered upon his.

30. Rev. William Myles, in his *History of the People Called Methodists*, London, 1813, says the first society was formed in 1766 by Embury, and that in the same year Strawbridge settled in Maryland and began to preach and form societies.

31. Rev. George Smith, in his *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, London, 1816, Vol. I, pp. 351-2, says Embury, in response to Barbara Heck's appeal, "delivered the first Methodist sermon ever preached in America to a congregation of five persons in his own house."

32. Rev. Luke Tyerman, in his *Life and Times of John Wesley*, London, 1872, speaks of the beginnings of Embury and Strawbridge in this order.

33. Rev. William Crook, in his *Ireland and the Centenary of American Methodism*, London and Dublin, 1866, after having fully investigated the case of Strawbridge, read all that Hamilton, Roberts, and others wrote about his arrival in America, said no

¹ Benson was urged by Fletcher to come to America, in 1773, with Captain Webb, but refused, believing he was in his right place in England.

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proof had been produced that the Maryland pioneer had left Ireland before 1766.

34. Mr. John Shillington, of Portadown, Ireland, called by Abel Stevens "the best authority in the Methodist history and antiquities of his country," wrote Stevens that his researches convinced him that Strawbridge did not leave Ireland earlier than 1764, nor later than 1765.

35. Rev. C. H. Crookshank in his elaborate History of Methodism in Ireland, Belfast, 1885, says Strawbridge removed to Tanderagee about 1764, to work on buildings near town. He itinerated extensively, married, and then emigrated.

16. HISTORIANS WHO THINK STRAWBRIDGE'S SOCIETY WAS FIRST

1. Rev. William Hamilton, of Baltimore, looms largest among those who, in the middle of the last century, espoused the view that Robert Strawbridge preached, organized a society, and built a church in Maryland before Philip Embury started his work in New York. In an able historical discourse, published in the Methodist Quarterly Review, July, 1856, he gave the grounds for his belief that Strawbridge was first, though after seeing Shillington's letter to Stevens to the effect that Strawbridge was in Ireland up to 1764 and perhaps in 1765, he admitted to that historian that "after all Mr. Shillington may be right."

2. Rev. George C. M. Roberts, of Baltimore, in letters to The Christian Advocate, in 1858, and in his Centenary Pictorial Album, 1866, expresses confi-

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dence that Strawbridge came to America in 1760 with his family, began soon to preach, and formed the first society and built the first church in America. Unfortunately he does not print or even quote the letters he relies upon as authority.

3. Rev. William Fort, of Baltimore, who collected materials for a History of Methodism in Maryland, in letters to *The Christian Advocate*, in 1844, expressed his "full conviction" that the log meeting-house was the first Methodist meeting-house in America, and he did not despair of finding the proof of it. The society formed by Strawbridge was surely the first in this country, for "Methodism was operating in Maryland several years before Embury or Captain Webb crossed the Atlantic," (!) He asserted with equal confidence and equal accuracy that Strawbridge did not come from Ireland at all, but from England.

4. Rev. John Lednum, in his *History of the Rise of Methodism in America*, 1859, declares that the Rev. George C. M. Roberts has "indubitably shown" that Strawbridge arrived in Maryland in 1760, accepts the statements of Roberts and Hamilton as establishing "beyond doubt that Strawbridge preached the first sermon and built the first church, and yet, further on in his book, he does indicate doubt as to the chapel, saying, "Wesley chapel was built, if not the log meeting-house of Pipe Creek, before Mr. Wesley's first missionaries arrived."

5. Bishop H. N. McTyeire, in his *History of Methodism*, Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1885, puts Strawbridge first chiefly on the basis of the Pipe

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Creek entry in Asbury's Journal, and the statements of Hamilton and Roberts. He offers no analysis of the testimony, no summary or valuation of proofs, and is not at pains to give authorities.

6. Rev. Edward J. Drinkhouse, in his *History of Methodist Reform*, Baltimore, 1899, says that "Asbury has settled beyond dispute that this (the log meeting-house at Sams Creek) was the first chapel built in America for the Methodists and the first society formed," and yet Asbury never said that the chapel was first.

Bishop Francis Asbury's Journal entry at Pipe Creek in 1801—"Here Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland—and America," is the best testimony for Maryland priority. Unfortunately for the Maryland case, all that he wrote about the beginnings of Methodism, both before and after his visit to Pipe Creek in 1801 down to his farewell address to the General Conference in 1816, was contrary to and irreconcilable with the last two words of the Pipe Creek entry.

Rev. John J. Tigert, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in his *Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism*, Nashville, Tenn., 1894, avoids "seeking to determine the question of the relative priority of Strawbridge's or Embury's work," and Rev. W. H. Daniels, in his *Illustrated History of Methodism*, 1891, is not positive, but accepts 1766 as the settled date.

There are, therefore, only six historians out of forty-four here cited who pronounce for the priority of Strawbridge.

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17. THE WITNESS OF EARLY ITINERANTS

Of itinerants, contemporary with Strawbridge, including pastors on the Frederick Circuit, not one, not even Strawbridge himself, ever said or wrote, so far as appears, that the Sams Creek society was first. The whole illustrious company either positively declared that Embury's society was first or that the Strawbridge society was formed at about the same time.

Among these witnesses we must include Joseph Pilmoor, the first regular Methodist preacher in America; Jesse Lee, the father of our Methodist history, Freeborn Garrettson, William Watters, Thomas Morrell, Ezekiel Cooper, Henry Boehm, William Colbert. Rev. Samuel Coate, who entered in the ministry in 1794, was pastor in Baltimore in 1802-4, and who married Miss Dulmage, a niece of Philip Embury, wrote to Rev. Joseph Benson of the death of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Dulmage, saying: "She was a sister of the first Methodist [Philip Embury] who ever received meetings in his house in New York or America."¹ Add also Thomas E. Bond, editor of *The Christian Advocate*, whose parents were converts of Strawbridge.

18. THE HISTORY OF STRAWBRIDGE'S SOCIETY VERY SHORT

Strawbridge's society dissolved and disappeared after a few years, and it has no certain lineal successor. Its glory, great as it was, has no living representative

¹ Quoted by Atkinson in his *Beginnings*, p. 45.

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to-day. There is nothing to crown but a memory, there is nothing to mark the site of the first church in Maryland but a spot in a field.

19. THE HISTORY OF EMBURY'S SOCIETY UNBROKEN

Embury's society has an unbroken history of a hundred and fifty years. Born of God, under Philip Embury, in 1766, it has lived through all the vicissitudes of the most changeful period of the world's civilization and the most miraculous national development in the annals of time. Started on its career by the glorious company of Palatines who came from Ireland in 1760, it has never been without a pastor, a place of worship, a membership, an official board, and regular services. Any one may trace its doings from the beginning, in its old record books, where he may find lists of its members and items of its expenditures. Its deeds and leases; its first subscription paper, with the amounts subscribed and the names of the subscribers, headed by that of Thomas Webb; lists of marriages and baptisms, and even lovefeast tickets dated as far back as 1769 are all preserved.

It is, as Dr. Thomas E. Bond, editor of *The Christian Advocate*, who was proud to say that his father and mother were converts of Strawbridge in Maryland, wrote in 1841, "a root of primitive Methodism still vigorous and growing on the very spot where the first scion was planted on these western shores and is, indeed, 'the mother of us all.' " The General Conference regards it as a sacred denominational monument and elects its trustees every four years. There

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is no Methodist church on this continent which can say, "I am older than thou."

Before passing on to the consideration of the claim for Strawbridge, I wish to submit a chronological outline of the life and work of Embury, that contrast may be made with the meager accounts of Strawbridge's career and the few dates that can be definitely connected with the important events of his life.

20. CHRONOLOGY OF PHILIP EMBURY

There is a chronological group of events, each having a definite date and all well supported by documentary evidence, some, for example, by entries in a "private and family memorandum book kept by Philip Embury himself,"¹ including the date of his baptism, the fact and date of his conversion, etc. This group embraces the more important events of his life and gives certainty to the record of his career.

1. Philip Embury was born in Ballingran, Ireland, and was baptized as an infant, September 7, 1728. (1)

2. Philip Embury was converted December 25, 1752. (2)

3. Philip Embury was recommended for the itinerancy to the Conference at Limerick, in August, 1758. (3)

4. Philip Embury was married to Margaret Sweitzer, in the Rathkeale Church, October 31, 1758. (4)

¹ Atkinson, *The Beginnings*, etc., pp. 222, 223, 225.

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5. Philip Embury preached his last sermon in Ireland, in June, 1760, from the deck of the ship that took him to America. (5)

6. Philip Embury, with the members of his Ballingran class, arrived in New York by the ship Perry, August 10, 1760. (6)

7. Philip Embury advertised for pupils for himself and his brother, John, in March and April, 1761, in Weyman's Gazette, a New York paper. (7)

8. Philip Embury, members of his class and others, applied to the Governor of the Colony of New York, for a patent of crown land, February 1, 1763. (8)

9. Philip Embury preached a sermon in his own house on Barracks Street, New York, to five persons including Barbara Heck, about the middle of October, 1766. (9)

10. Philip Embury formed a society near the end of October, 1766, or early in November of the same year. (10)

11. Philip Embury and others hired an upper room, also on Barracks Street, later in 1766. (11)

12. Philip Embury and others rented a larger meeting-place, a rigging-loft, early in 1767. (12)

13. Philip Embury and others started a subscription list for a church, probably in August, 1767. (13)

14. Philip Embury and others leased a lot on John Street, March 29, 1768, for the proposed church building. (14)

15. Philip Embury and others purchased the leased lot, March 30, 1768. (15)

16. Philip Embury dedicated the new church, October 30, 1768. (16)

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17. The second deed of the ground was received November 2, 1770. (17)

18. Philip Embury, his family and others, left New York City for Camden Valley, N. Y., in 1770. There he preached and founded another Methodist church in Ashgrove. (18).

19. Philip Embury died from the effects of an injury, in August, 1773. (19)

The list of authorities given in footnotes could be greatly enlarged; many of the items have several sponsors.

¹Atkinson's Beginnings, etc., p. 222.

²Ibid., p. 223.

³Crook's Ireland and the Centenary of American Methodism.

⁴Atkinson's Beginnings, etc., p. 223.

⁵Farrar's History of Limerick.

⁶Seaman's Annals of New York.

⁷Atkinson's Beginnings, etc., p. 224.

⁸Ibid., p. 39.

⁹Letter of "T. T.," see Seaman's Annals, etc.

¹⁰Peter Parks, quoted by Seaman, p. 22.

¹¹Seaman's Annals, p. 22.

¹²Ibid., p. 25.

¹³Streeter's Place of Methodism's Beginnings in America.

¹⁴Wakeley's Lost Chapters, etc., p. 51.

¹⁵Atkinson's Beginnings, etc.

¹⁶Seaman's Annals, etc., p. 41.

¹⁷Ibid., Appendix D.

¹⁸Atkinson's Beginnings, etc., p. 227.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 449.

PART II. CLAIMS FOR THE PRIORITY OF STRAWBRIDGE'S SOCIETY

It is necessary, in presenting this case, to go over some of the ground already traversed in the case for Embury and his work, and to repeat quotations given in Part I. Neither side of the controversy would be complete without this duplication.

I. THE CASE OF STRAWBRIDGE DIFFICULT

The case of Strawbridge, his society and his log meeting-house at Sams Creek, Maryland, is peculiarly difficult because it is unsupported by definite historical records or documents, letters, etc. There is no distinct and positive date asserted for his departure from Ireland, his arrival in America, his settling at Sams Creek, the beginning of his ministry, the formation of his society, or the building of his log meeting-house. There is no known letter, record, or writing of his in existence, and no statement by him up to the time of his death in 1781, which tradition has passed down the avenue of years, as to his early beginnings. Nor did his wife, who lived at least a decade after his end, leave any record or verbal statement that loving friends have treasured and transmitted, throwing light upon the chief facts of their life and work in America.

The claims for Strawbridge, as succinctly stated by the Rev. William Hamilton,¹ of the Baltimore Con-

¹ Early Methodism in Maryland, especially in Baltimore. By Rev. William Hamilton, *Methodist Quarterly Review*, July, 1856.

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ference, one of the best authorities on the subject, are that Strawbridge "preached the first sermon, formed the first society and built the first preaching-house for the Methodists in Maryland and in America, being three years perhaps earlier than Wesley Chapel, John Street, New York." The monument unveiled in 1814 to mark the place where the log meeting-house stood bears an inscription saying that "The first preacher of American Methodism, Robert Strawbridge, arrived in Frederick County about 1760," and that on that spot stood the log meeting-house, erected about 1764, "the first Methodist meeting-house in America." "About" is an indefinite term, only used when the exact date is unknown. If Strawbridge came to America "about 1760" it would be, in ordinary historical usage, sufficient to show that he came in 1759 or 1758; or in 1760, '61, or '62. That is, the term allows a range of at least five years. The same interpretation is applicable to the term "about 1764." It allows a variation of at least two years in either direction, forward or backward. It practically permits the fixing of a later date by two years or more. That is, the log-house may have been built in 1765 or 1766. The term "about" removes both events, the arrival of the man and the erection of the house, from the category of exact dates to that of undetermined, indefinite, and uncertain dates. The sesquicentennial of the log meeting-house must therefore be regarded as a "movable feast," although it was actually observed, according to report, in 1914. Really the date of the erection of the building, though a matter of historical interest, is not in issue here, as the real

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question to be determined is when the first Methodist society in America was formed.

2. POSITIVE DATES LACKING

I need not point out that history as a science cannot make legitimate use of guesses in place of positive facts; nor admit in support of a challenge of well-attested events and dates such vague and indefinite statements as those inscribed upon the Sams Creek tablet and made in the findings of the Joint Commission.

Would any court of law in dealing with a case like this refuse a motion to compel counsel on the other side to amend their suit so as to elect a definite and particular year, if not month, and win or lose according to their success or failure in proving it? In what particular year, not *about* what year, did Strawbridge arrive in Frederick County, Maryland? In what particular year, not *about* what year, was the log meeting-house erected? In what particular year, not *about* what year, did Strawbridge form the first society in Maryland?

In behalf of New York priority I have cited proof showing that Embury and his companions arrived in the City of New York in the month of August, 1760; that he formed a society in the latter part of the year 1766, and that Wesley Chapel was erected in 1768. I submit that it is not meeting the issue that has been raised to say that Strawbridge "preached the first sermon, formed the first society, and built the first preaching house in America." In what year was the first sermon preached? In what year was the first

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society formed? In what year was the first meeting-house built in Maryland? What definite dates are there, and what evidence is there to support such definite dates?

3. WHEN AND WHERE DID STRAWBRIDGE LAND IN AMERICA?

So far as I can ascertain no record has been produced showing in what year or from what port, or on what ship Robert Strawbridge sailed for America; nor at what port or in what year he landed. A very industrious investigator¹ who has examined ancient shipping records in England and Maryland, finds that the pioneer Methodist in Maryland could have come to Annapolis from Newry, Dublin, Belfast, or other convenient Irish port in 1759, 1760, or 1761; but she gives no proof whatever that Robert did come in any one of those years. She finds, however, in the arrival at Annapolis, in 1763, of a ship commanded by one John Strawbridge "the suggestion that Robert Strawbridge's presence in Maryland before this date had attracted one of his kinsmen hither." If there was any relationship whatever, of which not the faintest proof is offered, possibly the coming of John in his ship in 1763 led to the coming of Robert at a later date. We have only the guess of an imaginative author, founded solely on the similarity of name, and the alternative guess is just as good, if not better.

¹ The Beginnings of American Methodism. By Mrs. Arthur Barneveld-Bibbins, published at the Methodist Book Depository, Baltimore, 1916.

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4. WHAT IRISH AUTHORITIES SAY AS TO STRAWBRIDGE'S EMIGRATION

Obviously in default of any records in this country showing when the first Methodist preacher in Maryland came across the sea, we may look to records in Ireland for definite information. There are three Methodist authorities in Strawbridge's country who have studied this subject: Crook, Crookshank, and Shillington. What do they say? The Rev. William Crook,¹ says in the preface of his volume, that he went "both to Ballingran and Drumsna, so as to secure the most recent and reliable information about Embury and Strawbridge," and "spared no labor to make the book as accurate as possible." On "a careful revision of these sheets," he writes, "before sending them out to the world, I do not know of a single date or fact on which I have any remark to offer." He made a diligent search in Drumsna, our hero's birthplace, and, accompanied by John Laird, visited "every place of interest connected with Strawbridge's honored name and every person in the entire range of country likely to give us a ray of light on the family history." He adds that "we have little or no reliable dates and no documents illustrative of his life previous to his emigration." "We can only spell out our way as best we can by comparing one date with another and can only hope to be approximately correct."² He believes Strawbridge heard Mr. Wesley on his visit to Drumsna, in June, 1760, and that his religious impressions were received at that time. Shortly after

¹ Ireland and the Centenary of American Methodism. By the Rev. William Crook, London and Dublin, 1866.

² Ibid., p. 152.

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Strawbridge's conversion violent persecution by neighbors and friends forced him to leave Drumsna for Sligo, about the year 1761, where he joined the Society and became a zealous Methodist. Then he went to County Cavan, and preached frequently at Kilmore, where he was esteemed a man of devoted piety and of power as a preacher. In 1763 or 1764 he removed to Tanderagee, where he followed his trade as a carpenter, making Terryhugan his headquarters. From Terryhugan he itinerated through the neighboring country, leaving a name long cherished. In 1764 or 1765 he married a Miss Piper "and shortly after, probably in 1766," left Ireland with his young wife for America. The author says he does not fix upon these years dogmatically, but as the nearest approach to the true date. He had read all that Dr. Roberts, Dr. Hamilton, and others of Baltimore had to say about the matter, but had seen "no proof, as yet, that Strawbridge left Ireland before 1766,"¹ and thought it "impossible to prove" an earlier date.

Rev. G. H. Crookshank, in his *History of Methodism in Ireland*,² agrees with Crook's statement that Robert Strawbridge removed to Tanderagee in 1764, and itinerated from Terryhugan, where he married and soon after sailed for America.

John Shillington, of Portadown, Ireland, a diligent investigator, wrote to Stevens, our great historian, who called him "the best Irish authority in the Methodist history and antiquities of his country," that

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

² G. H. Crookshank, *Wesley and His Times*, vol. i, of *History of Methodism in Ireland*, 1885, p. 175.

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Strawbridge's emigration was "not earlier than 1764." This letter to Stevens so shook Hamilton's confidence in his own positive statement that Strawbridge came to America in 1759 or 1760, that he acknowledged in a letter to Stevens that "after all Mr. S. (Shillington) may be right."

Crook's details of Strawbridge's movements in Ireland, after his conversion at Drumsna, which he connects with Wesley's visit there in 1760; the persecution which drove the young convert to Sligo, where he became a member; his removal to County Cavan, and period of preaching at Kilmore; his migration to Tanderagee and preaching tours from Terryhugan; his marriage and emigration to America, involve the lapse of a considerable time, and make the date suggested for the departure to America, 1766, at least a reasonable one.

According to Dr. G. C. M. Roberts he came to America "with his wife and children."¹ These details make it morally impossible that Strawbridge could have been in Maryland in 1759 or 1760, or, indeed, before 1765 or 1766.

5. STRAWBRIDGE'S PRESENCE IN MARYLAND

There are two or three incidents accepted by Hamilton, Roberts, Fort, Lednum, and others as proof that Strawbridge was in Frederick County, Maryland, preaching and baptizing "several years before" Embury began to hold regular services in New York.

First. Baptism of the boy Henry Maynard.

¹ Article in *The Christian Advocate*, written in April, 1858, by George C. M. Roberts.

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Second. Conversion of Evans, under Strawbridge's call to repentance.

Third. Statement by Michael Laird, of Philadelphia.

6. DID STRAWBRIDGE BAPTIZE HENRY MAYNARD IN 1762?

First. The story of the baptism of Henry Maynard, which Dr. George C. M. Roberts said he derived from a "communication," the source of which he does not name, and the language of which he does not put in quotation marks, is to the effect that Strawbridge was preaching regularly at the house of John Maynard, a brother, or half-brother, of Henry. John Maynard was already a Methodist. On one occasion after preaching, Strawbridge baptized young Henry at a spring nearby. We are told that the boy was "then six or seven years old." But who said it, when was it said, and where is the record of it? We are left in the dark on these vital points. If these things were made clear in the "communication" to which Roberts alludes, it was a fatal oversight on his part not to print or quote from it. But his confidence seems to be in inverse proportion to his evidence, for he proceeds to argue that the fact that Henry Maynard died in 1837, aged eighty-one years, "fixes his baptism as early as 1762." We might guess at the process by which this conclusion is reached, but guesses do not make very good history. This is the way Roberts wrote in his article dated April 14, 1858, in *The Christian Advocate*.

In his *Centennial Pictorial Album*, published in 1866,

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he gives different dates. He says there that Henry Maynard died in 1839, aged eighty-two years, putting the date of death two years later and the age one year older. Nevertheless he uses his old formula and says "this fixes his baptism as early as 1762." These statements are contradictory, and both cannot be true; perhaps neither is true. He introduces another contradictory element in a remark attributed by Thomas C. Ruckle to Ephraim Maynard, to the effect that he was perfectly familiar with the baptism of Henry, which took place when he was "but five or six years of age." How old was he? One statement says five or six, another six or seven, and still another "four or five." One is tempted to ask, Was it intended for an infant baptism? And if so was it not extraordinary to administer infant baptism to a boy six or seven years of age? The fact that the Maynard Bible has entries showing that Henry Maynard was born May 12, 1757, and died December 28, 1837, does not solve the enigma; for the central fact to be proved is that of his baptism and the date. The record of the baptism is not given, and anything like proof of it is lacking.

7. WAS JOHN EVANS CONVERTED "ABOUT THE YEAR 1764"?

Second. The conversion of John Evans, one of Strawbridge's first converts. Hamilton gives the contents of a scrap of paper which he thinks "settles¹ the true origin of Methodism in America." As he describes it, "the paper has the stamp of age upon it,

¹ Hamilton, Article in Methodist Quarterly Review, July, 1856.

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and also the appearance of being torn from the fly-sheet of a Bible, or from some old record book; the writing," he adds, "is quite legible and in the style which obtained sixty years ago."

The purport of this detached and fugitive fragment is that John Evans was born in 1734 near Baltimore; removed, at the age of about fourteen, with his father to the neighborhood of Pipe and Sams Creek; married at the age of twenty-five; had nine children; became a Methodist under Strawbridge "about the year 1764," as also did his wife and four others; and offered his house as a preaching place.

This loose leaf bears no date, no name of locality, and is not signed by the man who is said to have written it. It purports to be signed by Samuel Evans, who says, "the above was written by my father, David Evans." That is, the grandson certifies that his father David, son of John, wrote the lines. We have here an unattached, undated, unsigned scrap of paper, purporting to state a fact in the life of John Evans, which is deemed to have historical significance. If it had been authenticated it might have some value as evidence. There are two men who could have authenticated it—John Evans, whose testimony would have been first-hand; his son, Daniel, who might have certified that the information came direct from his father. But neither of them signed or dated the document which, when it was written, was without a single mark to identify, verify, or authenticate it. Now comes a third person, who affixes to the statement a line to the effect that his father wrote it and adds his signature. Two hands appear, those of son and grandson, but

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there is still no name of place or of year or month. How can we attach historical value to an unidentified, unauthenticated, unsigned, and undated bit of paper, torn possibly out of a book before it was written upon? If it were a leaf in a Bible or a record book it might be identified by other entries or by the date of publication; but as a detached scrap of paper, how can it be accepted as proving anything? We are not told aught of its history. Who discovered it and where? Where is it now? Hamilton gives no particulars. He simply says he had it before him when he wrote his *Quarterly Review* article in 1856. He adds that Samuel Evans was still living. Why did he not get from him a history of the paper? Mrs. Bennett, daughter of John Evans, was also living; why did he not obtain an explanatory and confirmatory statement from her? He does quote her as saying the society was formed at Strawbridge's house; but she does not say in what year. That would have been testimony of value.

8. MICHAEL LAIRD'S TESTIMONY

Third. There remains for consideration Michael Laird's testimony. Roberts, who refers to it in his letter of April 14, 1858, to *The Christian Advocate*, does not actually say he has a letter from Laird, though he intimates he has and leads the reader to infer that Laird, who was born in 1771, and knew Leonard Strawbridge, a brother of Robert, thirty or forty years, wrote that Robert "came to America in 1760, with his wife and children, and settled in Maryland." Roberts does not print the letter, he does not give its

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date, he does not quote a line or word of it. And yet Roberts was an historical investigator, and should have known the superior value of testimony given in the language and over the signature of the witness himself, with name of place and precise date. This statement can have no value in settling the question of priority, as between Embury's and Strawbridge's Society.¹

If there is other testimony as to the year of the arrival of Strawbridge, the year when he formed the society at Sams Creek, and the year when the log meeting-house was erected, it has not, so far as I am aware, been divulged.

9. ASBURY'S PIPE CREEK ENTRY

I take up now the entry in the Journal of Francis Asbury, the father and founder, in a very true sense, of American Methodism. I think there is no disposition to underestimate anything that this heroic pioneer said or did in the nearly half century of his career in America. He arrived in America October 27, 1771, and closed his strenuous and most fruitful labors March 31, 1816. No man can understand the history of those eventful years of early Methodism—Methodism in the making—without a diligent study of Asbury's Journal, his letters, and his efforts to establish order and discipline. It will not be doing his fame any injustice to submit his statements to careful scrutiny, for this is part of the duty of the historian, who must not take as fact everything that claims to

¹ If it is the same letter that Laird wrote to The Christian Advocate in 1844, it does not say that Strawbridge came over in 1760.

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be fact, even though it be under the shelter of a great name. It should be remembered that Asbury was one of the busiest men of his time. In diligence and perseverance it is doubtful whether even John Wesley was his superior. Day and night, in good weather and bad, through storm and flood, in withering heat and benumbing cold, he journeyed, preaching wherever there was anybody to listen, and taking such rest in sleep as the circumstances might permit. Illness of various kinds, produced or aggravated by irregular and often unsuitable diet, exposure, privation, and prolonged exertion, frequently seized upon him, and the entries in his Journal are pathetic reminders of the suffering he endured and the sacrifices he made. The conditions were decidedly unfavorable to careful journal-making. He says himself that in the keeping of it he "labored under many embarrassments and inconveniences." He adds: "As I have had no certain dwelling-place in America my manuscripts have frequently been exposed to be lost and destroyed, but by the permission of Divine Providence I have collected them together."¹ His entries had often to be made at odd moments and under distressing circumstances, and the wonder is he continued to set down in his crabbed scrawl and abbreviated terms so much of value to posterity, and that his mistakes and misstatements were not more numerous. The editor of the latest and perhaps best edition of the Journal notes "much confusion and uncertainty as to dates" in many entries and some "blind allusions."² One

¹ Preface to second volume of his Journal, printed in his lifetime.

² Tipple's Heart of Asbury's Journal.

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of our historians points out not a few rather serious mistakes in the Journal as affecting its historical value.¹ But where is the Journal and where is the history that is free from errors? We do not discredit Stevens's colossal work because he calls the wife of Embury Mary instead of Margaret; nor do we reject Bangs's History for confusing the Hecks and the Hicks. We simply use our critical faculty in examining the facts of history by whomsoever presented. In all fairness, therefore, we must approach the study of Asbury's Journal without prejudice for or against his statements, but pass them under the clear, cold light of reason for examination and comparison.

We come now to the testimony ascribed to Asbury as to the formation of the first Methodist Society by Strawbridge.

10. THE TESTIMONY ASCRIBED TO ASBURY

So far as I have been able to investigate the sources of information and study things that have evidential value, the strongest reason for believing that Strawbridge was before Embury in forming a Methodist Society in America is the entry in Asbury's Journal of May 1, 1801, as follows:

"This settlement of Pipe Creek is the richest in the State; here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland—*and America.*"

Lednum, Hamilton, McTyeire, and some other historical writers accept this statement as very weighty, if not, indeed, as positively conclusive. The circumstances under which it was made and the character

¹ Atkinson's Beginnings of American Methodism.

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and position of him who is supposed to have made it, seem to them to add force to it. If I may venture to summarize, in my own way, the chief considerations advanced, I would say they are in substance these:

First, the entry was made by the honest, heroic Asbury, pioneer and bishop, who traveled more widely among the Methodist societies, met more of the early Methodists, and knew the preachers, churches, localities, and conditions better than any of his contemporaries.

Second, it was made by the man who had felt aggrieved at the course of Strawbridge in persisting in administering the ordinances contrary to Methodist law and order, and had said hard things about him, even after his death; Asbury, therefore, must have yielded this tribute reluctantly and only to the compelling power of the truth.

Third, it was made by one who had visited Pipe Creek frequently, known Strawbridge and his work thoroughly, and heard enough from friends of the Maryland pioneer to be persuaded that the statement was true.

Fourth, it was made on the ground, presumably from information by members of the society who knew Strawbridge's work and were familiar with the traditions as to the beginning of Pipe Creek Methodism.

Let us give all the weight to the entry which the circumstances require: nearness of time—only about a generation from the beginning; nearness of locality—on the very ground itself; opportunity to question and cross-question—members of the society were there to

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give details and to answer questions; honesty of the chronicler—Asbury would not set down as fact anything he was not persuaded was true.

II. THE SOURCE OF ASBURY'S INFORMATION

The first point of inquiry must obviously be, when and where and from whom did Asbury get the information that the added words "and America" involve? Lednum, who supports the claim of Pipe Creek priority, intimating that earlier the bishop had been of a different mind, says that "in 1801 Bishop Asbury came to a more correct understanding of the matter and entered in his Journal the truth which we presume he had then and there obtained."¹ This presumption may be natural enough; but it is, so far as appears, only a presumption. Dr. G. C. M. Roberts states, without qualification, but also without citation of authority, that the great pioneer bishop received at Pipe Creek more correct information than he had previously acquired, from Henry Willis and the Warfield family.² Bishop McTyeire, in his *History of Methodism*, 1885, says the words "and America" (which he asserts were put in italics by the bishop himself), "have the meaning of a man who, sure of his information, would put a doubtful question at rest." The author does not claim to have made any original study of the question, but evidently relied upon the statements of Lednum, as Lednum relied upon the statements of Hamilton, Roberts, and Fort.

¹ *The History of the Rise of Methodism in America.* By John Lednum, Philadelphia, 1859, p. 21.

² *Centennial Pictorial Album.* By G. C. M. Roberts, M.D., D.D., Baltimore, 1866.

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William Watters, a Maryland man, the first native-born Methodist itinerant, was with Asbury at Pipe Creek in 1801. No other living man was more competent to give Asbury information as to the beginning there, for entering the ministry in 1772, he traveled the Frederick circuit in 1775, and also on second and third appointments soon after. But he wrote in his autobiography¹ in 1806, five years after the Pipe Creek entry, that Strawbridge and Embury "were the first Methodist preachers in America." This, to say the least, is not consistent with that part of the Pipe Creek entry which asserts precedence for Strawbridge.

If Asbury did get information at Pipe Creek, from some person or persons, which convinced him that he had been wrong hitherto, it is strange that he did not say so, mention the name of his informant, and make some explanation or comment, and if he was there and then converted to a new view, it is stranger still that he never corrected his previous error in the place where it was made.

12. DID THE STRAWBRIDGES NEVER TELL ASBURY WHEN THEY ARRIVED?

But passing this point, we must ask the still more pertinent question, Is it possible that Bishop Asbury had never asked for or received information from the man best qualified to give it—Robert Strawbridge himself? Asbury knew Strawbridge well, and during the first ten years of his labors in America, corresponding with the last ten years of Strawbridge's life, met him often. He saw him first November 11, 1772,

¹ A Short Account, etc., of the Ministerial Labors of William Watters, p. 109.

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at his own house at Pipe Creek; called on him again the next week, and met him four weeks later at a quarterly meeting at James Presbury's. On at least four different occasions Asbury met him in 1773, and a number of times in the following years. They must have been together many hours in the aggregate, and must have talked of other things than administering the ordinances, about which they never could agree. Is it possible they never referred to their coming to America? Is it conceivable that the man who emigrated from England never asked the man who emigrated from Ireland when he came to this country, what was the port of his arrival, when he went to Sams Creek, when he began his work there, when he formed the first society and organized the first class? It was Asbury's business to know all that was to be known about every preacher and every society. Had Strawbridge never told Asbury anything about himself and his work? Had Asbury no interest in knowing and so did not ask? It can hardly be a matter of doubt that these things were the subject of conversation, and if so, Asbury would have known twenty years or more before the Pipe Creek entry, from the best possible source, the facts in the case.

Nor was the information Asbury got at Pipe Creek from Mrs. Robert Strawbridge, who was the next most competent witness. Mrs. Strawbridge, the devoted wife of the earliest Methodist preacher in Maryland, was not then in Pipe Creek. She had removed to Baltimore County with her husband, about the year 1776, according to Rev. William Hamilton,¹ who says

¹ Article in *Methodist Quarterly Review*, July, 1856.

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she died there. Her husband died in 1781. She was living in 1792, according to the Rev. William Colbert.¹ The information Asbury is supposed to have got in 1801 he did not get from the Strawbridges, and yet in labors in Maryland, extending through years, he had as good opportunities to get it as anybody else living in 1801.

13. THE PART OF THE ENTRY IN DISPUTE

There is, of course, no question as to the accuracy of the entry so far as the priority of the Pipe Creek society in Maryland is concerned. It was, everybody admits, the first Methodist society in Maryland. The point of dispute is over the last two words, "and America." Why were they added to a sentence complete and perfectly intelligible and perfectly true without them? Was it Asbury's hand that wrote them? Dr. William Hamilton, who had made the fullest study perhaps of the Strawbridge beginning stated, in an historical address published in the Methodist Quarterly Review in 1856, that these words "and America" were underscored by Asbury's own hand. But he does not tell us how he learned this. Certainly not from the Journal manuscript, for that was destroyed by fire in 1836, and even if he could have seen it he would not have seen Asbury's hand, but the hand of his transcriber, Francis Hollingsworth. The Journal as printed certainly shows the two words in italics, but it is possible the italics may have a significance different

¹ The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America. By John Atkinson, p. 36.

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from that evidently in the mind of Dr. Hamilton. If the underscoring was by Asbury, it may have been simply to mark the words as tentative, and therefore to be further considered. However, it is hardly worth while to spend time in discussing a matter as to which the precise explanation cannot certainly be reached.

14. FACTS OPPOSED TO AND IRRECONCILABLE WITH THE CLAIM BASED OF THE LAST TWO WORDS OF THE ENTRY

We must give full and fair consideration to the claim for Strawbridge's priority, based on the Pipe Creek entry, but we must also, for the truth's sake, look at a remarkable series of facts that stand opposed to, and seem irreconcilable with that claim.

First. At no time, before or after this entry in the Journal was made, did Francis Asbury, so far as any record shows, write in any letter to anybody, or enter in any book or record, or other document, a single word confirmatory of the Pipe Creek entry.

Second. After the Pipe Creek entry Asbury continued to assign priority to Embury's society.

Third. None of the diaries, journals, or records of the preachers contemporary with Asbury, give any support to the claim that Strawbridge's society was the first in America.

Fourth. The uniform testimony borne by Jesse Lee, Freeborn Garrettson, Joseph Pilmoor, Bishop Coke, Philip Watters, Thomas Morrell, Ezekiel Cooper, Henry Boehm, Thomas E. Bond, Samuel Coate, and others, contradicts the claim for Strawbridge.

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Fifth. The early historians of Methodism, without exception, give priority to Embury's society.

Let us take up these five statements consecutively and see what support can be given them.

15. ASBURY NEVER WROTE IN CONFIRMATION OF THE PIPE CREEK ENTRY

First. At no time, before or after the entry in the Journal was made, did Francis Asbury, so far as any record shows, write in any letter to anybody, or enter in any book or record, or other document, a single word confirmatory of the Pipe Creek entry.

Is it conceivable that if Asbury had discovered in 1801 a fact of history not known to him before, or not regarded by him as fully established, a fact contradictory of previous statements he himself had made, and especially of the historical statement he himself had written for the Discipline—is it conceivable that he could have made such a revolutionary statement without a single syllable of explanation or correction? He lived fifteen years after the date of the Pipe Creek entry, wrote extensively in his Journal, had a considerable correspondence, and in his continuous journeying saw and talked with preachers and laymen constantly, and yet his Journal contains no other reference to the priority of the Strawbridge Society, and there is no record to show that he ever wrote of the matter to anybody. If he had information in 1801 at Pipe Creek which compelled him to change his conviction of thirty years' standing as to the priority of Embury's Society, his subsequent silence, whatever he may have thought about the relative importance of

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the fact, is strange indeed. Why did he never say to Lee or Garrettson, or Cooper, or Morrell, or Boehm, or any of the other preachers with whom he was intimate, that he had discovered that Embury's society was not first after all, but Strawbridge's? That he could not have told them so is clear from the fact that they continued to give priority to Embury's society.

16. ASBURY CONTINUED TO ASSERT THE PRIORITY OF EMBURY'S SOCIETY

Second. After the Pipe Creek entry, Asbury continued to assign the priority to Embury's society.

If he meant to say in the Pipe Creek entry that Strawbridge's society was not only the first in Maryland, but also in America, then his Historical Statement in the Discipline was wrong, and it was his plain duty to correct it. He never did correct it, and it asserts to-day, just as it asserted before the Pipe Creek entry, the priority of Embury. We cannot think of Francis Asbury as violating his conscience, or shirking an obligation of duty. Whatever human faults may be charged against him, neither insincerity nor lack of courage was one of them. If the Pipe Creek statement was right, the information sent to Wesley giving priority to the New York beginning was wrong and the current belief was wrong. As an honest man he was under obligation to correct the wrong, and he had the power to do it and to do it effectively. A very slight change in the Disciplinary sketch would have corrected the error, if error there were, placed the honor where it belonged, and made

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the Pipe Creek entry and the sketch harmonious and consistent. The fact that he never made the change, but continued to publish editions of the Discipline till the day of his death with the former statement unchanged, though some of the sentences were revised, leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Discipline presented the fact as he understood it.

Then what is to be said about the Pipe Creek statement? Simply this, I think: he intended there to say, and did say, that the Pipe Creek society was the first Methodist society in Maryland. As to the words "and America," it is useless to speculate about them. Perhaps he did not write them; they may have been added by Francis Hollingsworth, who transcribed the Journal. If he did write them possibly he intended to say that the Pipe Creek society was the first in Maryland and the second in America. But this is a case where one man's guess is as good as another's.

We are simply left to interpret Asbury by Asbury, and to correct Asbury by Asbury. He seems to say at one time and in one place in his Journal that Strawbridge's society was earlier than Embury's; at another time and place in his Journal, July 11, 1803, he does not seem to know that there were any Methodists, even as late as 1771, in Maryland. He gives numbers for New York and Philadelphia, says there were a few in New Jersey, mentions none south of Philadelphia.¹ Both of these entries are hasty scrawls,

¹ "Our total for the year 1803 are 104,070 members. In 1771 there were about 300 Methodists in New York, 250 in Philadelphia and a few in New Jersey. I then longed for 100,000; now I want 200,000—nay thousands upon thousands." Tipple's *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, p. 531.

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the later one particularly wild. But what he said in his farewell address was well considered, and what he said in the Historical Statement was deliberate and official, prepared for the most important book known to the Church next to the Bible. If he did add and underscore the words "and America" in his Journal, it may have been simply with the thought of making further investigation; but what he prepared for the Discipline he prepared for the whole Church, and put it into the book of the Church containing its rules, its laws, its articles of religion, its government, and its ritual; the book every preacher must have for his instruction and guidance; every class leader, exhorter, licensed preacher, trustee, must consult to ascertain his duties, and every loyal layman must seek for the rules that should govern his conduct. Would he permit a statement he had previously made in good faith to remain after his eyes were opened to the truth at Pipe Creek? Assuredly not. The question carries its own answer.

17. THE TESTIMONY OF CONTEMPORANEOUS DIARIES AND JOURNALS

Third. None of the diaries, journals, records of the preachers or Methodist historians contemporary with Asbury give any support to the claim that Strawbridge's society was the first in America. This is strange, indeed, if the claim was true. Strawbridge knew and was known by a host of the early preachers, who must have been more or less familiar with his life and his work. Why do we find nothing about his priority in the journals or recollections of Jesse Lee,

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Freeborn Garrettson, William Watters, Philip Gatch, Ezekiel Cooper, Henry Boehm—all of whom knew him and wrote about him and traveled and preached in Maryland? Why is it that Richard Owen, one of his own converts, who preached his funeral sermon, said nothing—at least nothing that has been preserved—about the priority of his Sams Creek Society? Why is it that none of the brave company of preachers who are claimed as his converts left a word of testimony as to when he formed the Sams Creek society? If it be said that probably they did not know that there was any question of priority, and that knowing so well themselves when the Sams Creek Society was formed it never occurred to them to speak about it, the reply is, that those who had the Discipline, and of course the preachers all had it, knew that Asbury there gave priority to Embury's society. Why is it that nobody complained of the inaccuracy and injustice of Asbury's Historical Statement putting Embury's society first? The utter silence of the early preachers as to the alleged error in the Disciplinary statement cannot be a mere coincidence.

18. THE TESTIMONY OF A HOST OF THE EARLY PREACHERS FOR EMBURY

Fourth. The uniform testimony borne by Jesse Lee, Freeborn Garrettson, William Watters, Thomas Morrell, Ezekiel Cooper, Henry Boehm, Joseph Pilmoor, Thomas E. Bond, and others contradicts the claim for Strawbridge.

Rev. Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman, the "first regular Methodist preachers on the Continent,"

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according to the Discipline of 1787, arrived in Philadelphia in October, 1769. In Pilmoor's manuscript journal, in the care of the Philadelphia Methodist Historical Society, is found an entry dated November 4, 1769: "The work of God begun by him (Captain Webb) and Mr. Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland, soon spread through the greater part of Baltimore County and several hundreds of people were brought to repentance and turned unto the Lord." This shows that Pilmoor, when only a month in this country, knew of the Strawbridge beginning in Maryland, and makes more significant this further statement from Pilmoor's Journal: "The work of God, which has so wonderfully spread in a few years through most parts of Great Britain and Ireland lately reached across the Atlantic ocean. This was brought about by several poor people that had been in communion with the Methodists in Europe who went to settle in that country. After some time they were joined by Mr. William Lupton, a gentleman of considerable property in New York, and not long after by Mr. Thomas Webb, who became a preacher among them and helped them much. As they met with great encouragement and found the people of New York very desirous of hearing, they resolved to build a chapel and did all in their power to promote the work."¹

Pilmoor here gives the precedence to New York.

Rev. Jesse Lee, a native of Virginia, who became a Methodist in 1774, a local preacher a few years later,

¹ Atkinson's Beginnings, p. 39.

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and entered the itinerancy in 1783, traveling, as he says,¹ "from St. Mary's River, Georgia, to Passamaquoddy Bay, in the District of Maine," wrote in his Journal in New York, in 1801, that in "the City of New York was the first society formed in the United States," and confirmed this statement in his History, in 1810, the first extended History of Methodism in America.

Rev. Freeborn Garrettson grew to manhood in Baltimore County, entered the ministry in 1776, and received his first appointment to Frederick Circuit, covering Pipe Creek. He had met Strawbridge, and had excellent opportunities to know whether the Pipe Creek Society was the first in America, and yet he declared in his semi-centennial sermon, preached in 1826, that the society in New York was formed in 1766 and a chapel built, and adds, "Some time after this Mr. Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland, settled at a place called Pipe Creek in Maryland, formed a society and built a log meeting-house."²

Rev. William Watters, a Maryland convert, entered the ministry in 1772, and was the first American-born traveling preacher, said in his autobiography, p. 109: "Richard Owen was awakened under the preaching of Robert Strawbridge who, with one more, Philip Embury, were the first Methodist preachers in America."³ He does not support the claim that Strawbridge was *the* first; but couples him with Embury

¹ Short History of Methodism, 1810, Preface.

² Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America, Atkinson, pp. 42, 43.

³ Watters, A Short Account, etc., p. 109.

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and puts both in the same class, going out of his way and out of the grammatical highway to do so.

Rev. Thomas Morrell, who preached in Wesley Chapel, New York, in 1790-3, wrote in his Journal¹ that his mother was converted about the year 1860, "and when Mr. Embury, the first Methodist preacher came over, she was among the first who joined the society in New York, and consequently among the first Methodists in America." He says distinctly that Embury was the *first* Methodist preacher, not one of the first; and that his mother was among the first Methodists in America, which cannot mean that there were members of another society two or three years earlier.

Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, a native of Maryland, who became an itinerant in 1785, and succeeded John Dickins as Book Publisher, preached in Philadelphia in 1816 a funeral sermon of his friend Asbury, which was afterward carefully written out and published, in which he stated that "the first society was formed by Philip Embury" in New York.

Rev. Henry Boehm, an early Methodist preacher, associate and executor of Asbury, wrote in 1851, in response to an inquiry by Dr. Wakeley as to the views in the early days as to the priority of New York and Maryland, that he heard Strawbridge preach in 1779, entered the itinerancy in Maryland in 1801, traveled with Asbury for the five years ending in 1813; went with him through Maryland several times, visiting Pipe Creek; saw the log meeting-house in 1808, then used as a barn; talked often with preachers and mem-

¹ The MS. is preserved by one of his descendants.

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bers in Maryland, and "never heard any claim that Methodism in Maryland was earlier than in New York. It was universally admitted that Methodism in New York had the priority." Henry Boehm lived many years after this letter was written, and his memory, always remarkably good, was unimpaired for a long period thereafter. His testimony is positive and strong.

Rev. William Colbert, a colleague and friend of Henry Boehm, born in Maryland and among the early itinerants of that State, left a Journal in which, according to Atkinson, who saw it, contains this entry under date of February 24, 1792: "Visited Sister Strawbridge, the widow of one of the first Methodist preachers that appeared in America." He does not say *the* first, but one of the first. If Strawbridge was first by two or three years, Colbert would have known it, for he traveled on Hartford Circuit, where the Maryland pioneer had labored, and coming fresh from an interview with his widow, could not have classed him as *one* of the first, if both the widow and himself had known that his society was first. The Discipline, with its Historical Statement giving priority to Embury, was, of course, in the possession of Colbert, and probably was also known to Mrs. Strawbridge. It scarcely seems possible that either could have been under any misapprehension. The widow, treasuring the memory of her husband and his devoted labors, would have satisfied her visitor that her husband was first, if such had been the fact.

Thomas E. Bond, of Maryland, editor of The Christian Advocate, whose parents were converted

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under Strawbridge, gave priority to Embury's Society.¹

19. THE EARLY HISTORIANS ALL FOR EMBURY'S PRIORITY

Fifth. The early historians of Methodism, without exception, give priority to Embury's society.

Asbury himself was the first to attempt an historical sketch of American Methodism. In his Journal he said in an entry of March 22, 1780, "I have been collecting all the minutes of our conferences in America to assist me in a brief history of the Methodists, and an account of our principles." April 12, six weeks later, he wrote, "I was employed in writing a short history of the Methodists." What was this short history, and what became of it? So far as we know, Asbury never published such a history apart from the Discipline. The first Discipline, containing also the minutes of the Christmas Conference at Baltimore, printed in 1785, had a brief statement as to the rise of Methodism in England, but nothing concerning the beginning of American Methodism. The second Discipline, printed in 1786, had nothing more on this subject. The third Discipline, of 1787, dealt in Section 1 with "the Rise of Methodism, so-called, in England and America," and in answer to the question, "What was the rise of Methodism in America?" the following paragraph appeared:

During the space of thirty years past, certain persons,

¹ The Christian Advocate, May 5, 1841. "We are glad to see a root of Primitive Methodism still vigorous and growing, in the very spot where the first scion was planted on these western shores. John Street Church in a certain sense is the 'mother of us all.'"

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members of the Society, emigrated from England and Ireland and settled in various parts of this country. About twenty years ago, Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland began to preach in the City of New York and formed a society of his own countrymen and the citizens. In the same year Thomas Webb preached in a hired room near the barracks, and in the year 1767 the rigging loft was occupied. About the same time, Robert Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick county, in the State of Maryland, and preaching there formed some societies. In 1769 Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor came to New York, who were the first regular Methodist preachers on the Continent. In the latter end of the year 1771 Francis Asbury and Richard Wright of the same order came over.

Was this the "Short History" Asbury prepared in 1780, seven years earlier? If so, it was strangely meager and strangely long withheld from publication, but its testimony was for Embury's priority.

20. OTHER STATEMENTS OF ASBURY OPPOSED TO THE PIPE CREEK ENTRY

The fact that the Discipline has borne continuously and consistently the same testimony from the first, puts Asbury among the historical witnesses to the priority of Embury's Society, and impeaches the accuracy of the only written statement to the contrary attributed to him, namely the Pipe Creek entry, which remains unexplained, but also unverified, unconfirmed, and unsupported.¹ Asbury himself made statements

¹ The letter of Rev. Alfred Griffith, of the Baltimore Conference, born in 1783, died in 1871, to the effect that Asbury once told him in answer to a question that Strawbridge was before Embury, I have not seen, and know not its date; but whatever Griffith may have understood Asbury to say, Asbury's own written statements down to the year of his death must be taken as conclusive.

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after the date of that entry which do not harmonize with the Pipe Creek entry. In his Journal in 1803, only two years later, he wrote that in 1771 "there were about 300 Methodists in New York, 250 in Philadelphia, and a few in New Jersey," omitting all mention of Maryland. In a letter to Stith Mead,¹ dated July 30, 1807, in comparing the growth of American Methodism with British, he says:

"Methodism began in America 1769 and '70 but chiefly, as very little was done till the later end of the year, '71, except a small beginning in York and Philadelphia." No mention is here made of the beginning in Maryland. He admits that the work in New York and Philadelphia began before 1769 and 1770. If Maryland had been first he could not have omitted a reference to it. In his farewell address to the General Conference of 1816, he wrote: "Only recollect as far as your observation or information will go what God hath done by us in Europe and America in about seventy years in Europe and less than fifty years in America."² Fifty years go back to 1766, but not further.

21. BOURNE'S IMPORTANT TESTIMONY

Mr. George Bourne, of Baltimore, the second historian of American Methodism in point of time, wrote and published in 1807, in Baltimore, *The Life of John Wesley*, to which he added *A Comprehensive History of American Methodism*. This was the first Methodist history of any considerable length. His account

¹ Published in *facsimile* in *The Christian Advocate*, March 22, 1916.

² See *The Christian Advocate*, Asbury Number, March 16, 1916.

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of the beginning of Embury's work in the latter part of 1766 and Captain Webb's preaching in 1767 is followed by this statement:

"At this period Mr. Strawbridge, a local preacher from Ireland settled in Frederick county, Md., and formed several societies." This confirms the sketch in the Discipline as to the priority of Embury's society. But Bourne, who a few years later became part proprietor of the Baltimore Evening Post and Mercantile Daily Advertiser, goes on to say, what no other writer had previously mentioned, so far as appears, that it had "long been a question with the curious, who are anxious to know every circumstance which is connected with the commencement of Methodism in the United States, whether the first society and the first house of worship was erected in Maryland or New York, whether the old log house in which Mr. Strawbridge preached on Pipe Creek was not antecedent to the building which was used by Captain Webb and Mr. Embury." He adds that "after the most accurate research, the information which I have procured induces me to believe that a Methodist society was formed at New York at least nine or twelve months previous to the first which was collected by Mr. Strawbridge and there can be no doubt that the room and even the rigging house were devoted to the public worship of God in New York prior to the use of the log-house on Pipe Creek."¹ Bourne prints, as affording additional intelligence on the subject, the letters of "T. T.," April 11, 1768,

¹ A Comprehensive History of American Methodism. By George Bourne, Baltimore. Printed by George Dobbin and Murphy, 1807, pp. 321, 322.

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addressed to John Wesley and of "T. B.," dated Charleston, May 1, 1769, addressed to Mr. Cussons. He said he had the benefit of "several new documents, and had consulted Bishop Asbury's Journal, from which he makes several quotations and "various journals and lives" of Methodist ministers. Moreover "several intelligent members of the Society" had "communicated the result of their researches." According to the preface of the volume his purpose was "an impartial and exact relation of facts." He was living in Baltimore, and could have made the journey to Pipe Creek, at little cost of time or money, and it is highly probable that some of those with whom he conferred and from whom he received letters were well acquainted with the facts as to the Strawbridge beginning. Being a Maryland man and writing with Maryland readers constantly in view, he cannot be charged with a bias against Strawbridge. I call special attention to the significance of the fact that he knew that some claimed that the Strawbridge Society was older than that of Embury. He is the first of the early writers to mention this circumstance. He evidently conducted his inquiry with this claim in view, and his decided opinion that the Embury Society was first by from nine to twelve months has, therefore, all the more weight.

22. JESSE LEE'S WEIGHTY TESTIMONY

Rev. Jesse Lee, who was born in Virginia, converted in 1774, entered the itinerancy in 1783, was a wide traveler, an intelligent observer, and a faithful chronicler, wrote the fullest history of American Methodism

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that had been published before the death of Asbury. Like that great circuit rider, whom he saw often, he kept a journal. The journal itself was destroyed by fire in 1836, but an entry which he wrote in it early in 1801, the same year in which the Pipe Creek entry was made in Asbury's Journal, was preserved in the *Memoirs of Lee*, by Manton Thrift. It opens as follows:

"I will here set down an account of the beginning of Methodism in the City of New York, which was the first society formed in the United States. This society was formed by Philip Embury, from Ireland, in the beginning of the year 1766, when a few of his own countrymen were joined with him."¹

When Lee's *Short History of the Methodists* appeared in 1810, it contained the following confirmatory sentences, showing that what he had learned by his research and investigation during the intervening nine years bore out his earlier statement:

"In the beginning of the year 1766 the first permanent Methodist society was formed in the City of New York." "Not long after the society was formed in New York, Robert Strawbridge, from Ireland, who had settled in Maryland, began to hold meetings in public and joined a society together near Pipe Creek."² This is testimony of a high order from an observant and faithful witness. Moreover, Asbury wrote in his Journal, June 26, 1810: "I have seen Jesse Lee's History for the first time; it is better than I expected." He did not challenge Lee's statement as to the priority of Embury's society, nor criticize him

¹ Atkinson's *Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America*, p. 16

² Lee's *Short History of the Methodists*, pp. 24, 20.

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for anything, except that he "has not always presented me under the most favorable aspect."¹

See also fuller discussion in Part I, pp. 27ff.

23. REV. JONATHAN CROWTHER ALSO A WITNESS FOR EMBURY

There was published in New York in 1813, a History of the Wesleyan Methodists, by Rev. Jonathan Crowther, who had "been for more than twenty-six years a traveling preacher" among them. This book stated that "Methodism had its first introduction into America by certain persons who emigrated thither from England and Ireland, assisted by a Lieutenant commonly called Capt. Webb, who was in New York with the Army and preached there and at Philadelphia with great zeal and success."²

The fifth history, in point of time, bearing the title "A Short Historical Account of the Early Society of Methodists, established in the City of New York, in the year 1763, through the means of Philip Embury," was published in New York in 1824, by W. & P. C. Smith, "and sold" according to its own statement, "by them at 59 Fulton Street, by the Book Agents, 55 Fulton Street and by book-sellers in general." According to Dr. Wakeley it was sold at The Methodist Book Concern for thirty-three years.³ The testimony, of its title dates Embury's Society back to 1763. On

¹ Tipple's Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 624, 625.

² A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism, or the History of the Wesleyan Methodists, by Jonathan Crowther, who has been more than thirty-one years a member, and above twenty-six a traveling preacher among them. Published by James Eastburn, 86 Broadway, New York, 1813, p. 37. An abridged edition of 156 pages was published in Fredericktown, Md., in 1819.

³ Lost Chapters, etc., by Rev. J. B. Wakeley, 1858, p. 179.

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what authority this statement was made the volume itself, which contains many interesting facts, does not indicate.

Of all the notable histories of Methodism written in the last hundred years, only Lednum's and McTyeire's and Drinkhouse's accept the Pipe Creek entry in Asbury's Journal as any considerable factor in settling the question of priority. Bangs, Wakeley, Stevens, Atkinson, Hurst, Buckley, all with more or less decisiveness, give verdict in favor of the priority of Em-bury's society, as will be seen from quotations given in Part I. Other histories, less elaborate take, almost without exception, the same position on the question of priority.

24. DECLARATIONS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

The latest edition of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church bears the same testimony for the John Street society that it bore at the beginning. The General Conference, which has full control over all its contents except the Constitution, General Rules, and Articles of Religion, has never ordered a revision of its ancient historical statement. The General Conference of 1860 was asked by a memorial from the Baltimore Conference to appoint an earlier year than 1866 for the centenary of American Methodism and the distinguished committee to whom it was referred, Dr. N. J. Morgan, of the Baltimore Conference; Dr. E. O. Haven, of the New England Conference; Dr. T. C. Holliday, of the Southeast Indiana Conference; Dr. J. T. Crane, of the Newark Conference, and Dr. M. D'C. Crawford, of the New York

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Conference, agreed upon a report which the General Conference adopted, without a division, refusing the request, and declaring that while it was now claimed that "Methodism was introduced in Maryland as early as 1760, it must nevertheless be admitted that the first association or organization of American Methodism" was the Embury society in New York. The year 1866 was widely observed as the centenary of American Methodism.

I do not say that because the Methodist Episcopal Church has officially, from the beginning to the present, asserted the priority of the Embury Society in New York, and never for a moment has conceded that Strawbridge's society was earlier, it follows that its position can never be changed. But I do say that the account of the rise of American Methodism that the Church has accepted from the beginning and defended for a hundred and fifty years cannot be set aside without positive, definite proof that the Strawbridge society was formed before the Embury Society came into existence.

25. THE GROWTH OF MARYLAND METHODISM AS AN ARGUMENT FOR ITS PRIORITY

The argument that the growth of Methodism in Maryland requires the acceptance of the earlier date assigned to Strawbridge's work, has little or no basis of fact. If he really began work in 1760 there was amazingly little in the way of results in the next eleven years. All told American Methodism had only 360 members in 1771. Of these, New York and Philadelphia had the major part. Frederick Circuit, which

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Lednum¹ calls "the birthplace of American Methodism," embraced in 1774 all the Methodist work in Frederick County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia. He says it had grown "slowly" from the beginning. Gatch, when he traveled it in 1774, found only 175 members on it, and it grew little until 1775, when "the great revival" added 200 to it. Kent Circuit, on the Eastern Shore, begun by Strawbridge in 1769 or 1770, had surpassed it in 1775, and Philadelphia had more members in 1773 than all of the ten or more places on Frederick Circuit had in 1774. Of the 1,160 members returned for 1773, 560 were in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, 500 in Maryland, and 100 in Virginia. Both English and native preachers worked more at that time in Maryland than in any other State. In 1776, out of a total increase of nearly 1,800, all but 300 were credited to Virginia and North Carolina. It is true that Strawbridge had extended his work to Baltimore and Harford Counties; but all Maryland presents no problem of growth as great as that in Virginia and North Carolina.

New York and Philadelphia were centers of population which had a good supply of churches; Maryland had not. The rural sections had little of gospel privilege, and it was in them the fervent preacher met the readiest response. In the early years of the Revolutionary conflict, "the iron-heel of the war," as Lednum expresses it, was "treading down Methodism" in the North, and it decreased; after 1779, it was set upon the South and decrease of members inevitably

¹ Rise of American Methodism, pp. 134, et seq.

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followed. Really Methodism in New York presents a greater problem than Methodism in Maryland, for in two years from the beginning of the first feeble society, a lot had been purchased on John Street and a church erected costing over £700. How could so great a result be worked out so quickly by such a small, weak band?

26. THE SAMS CREEK LOG MEETING-HOUSE

It is claimed that the log meeting-house on Sams Creek was built "about 1764." There is a tradition to this effect, but little in the way of evidence. Asbury, according to Drinkhouse, settled the priority of the chapel beyond dispute; but Asbury's Pipe Creek entry had reference alone to the society. Dr. Hamilton and Rev. William Fort affirmed the priority of the chapel, but gave no evidence. Fort admitted he could not state the precise time when the chapel was built; but he did not despair of finding proof, although the subject was "fraught with great difficulty," as many of the members had long been scattered. Atkinson gives a chapter to the log chapel in his *Beginnings*, pp. 90, *et seq.*, and contends that the oldest writings relating to it are those of Pilmoor's Journal. In his visit to Maryland in June, 1772, Pilmoor speaks of riding from Dallam's, "on a branch of the Chesapeake," to "a new chapel which a number of planters have lately built for the Methodists." Atkinson argues that this refers to the Sams Creek building, the only known house of the kind in the State. Pilmoor also preached in "a new chapel," three weeks later, riding to it from Deer Creek. A "new chapel" "lately built," could

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not apply to one built in 1764. It was probably one and the same chapel, and what is said about it is similar to Asbury's description, in his Journal, December, 1772, "Went about five miles to preach in our first preaching house. No windows or doors," etc.

Dr. John Emory, president of Dickinson College, and author of a History of the Discipline, who was especially interested in the early events of Maryland Methodism, and collected much material for a Life of Asbury, which was begun but not finished,¹ inserted an account which he had evidently procured about the log chapel in his Life of Asbury. The initials L. B. or Z. B. were attached to it. Atkinson supposes them to belong to Mrs. Bennett. The following is the brief statement copied from Atkinson's Beginnings:

The old log building occupied by Mr. Strawbridge as a preaching house stood at the head of a small drain that runs into Sams Creek, in about the distance of half a mile. It is said in Wesley's Life, Pipe Creek, but it is Sams Creek. It was built of hewed logs, the whole raised and covered. Sleepers were put in, which were the only seats belonging to it. Doors and windows were cut and faced but there was no pulpit. There a society was raised. The first men there, so far as I know, were John Evans, Andrew Poulson, Benjamin Macarel, and John England.

Dr. Emory, according to Atkinson, gave it as his own conclusion, that the log meeting-house "was not built later than 1772 and probably not before."

Jesse Lee, Ezekiel Cooper, Peter Parks, Bishop Coke, Henry Boehm, and others say that the church erected in New York was the first Methodist meeting-

His manuscripts are in Drew Library.

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house in America. Rev. Henry Smith, who went with Bishop McKendree to Sams Creek, in 1820, says: "This was the first meeting-house in Maryland and the second in America." Lednum was not sure that it was before Wesley Chapel. He admits that the latter may have been first. (See Part I, p. 45.)

The honor of being the "second in America" certainly belongs to the log meeting-house. It was not long used for services, but it was the first chapel built for Methodism in Maryland.

27. INFERENCES, TRADITIONS, INCIDENTS FOR STRAWBRIDGE, BUT NO POSITIVE PROOF

Actual proof has not so far been furnished for the priority of Strawbridge. The argument that has been advanced for it offers no positive chronological or documentary evidence, but only inferences, unsupported traditions, and unverified incidents. A recent pamphlet containing many interesting suggestions, some valuable identifications of localities and buildings, seems to promise much; but its value as a contribution to the settlement of the question at issue vanishes on a critical examination. The writer has not had the privilege of hearing or seeing Dr. John F. Goucher's elaborate paper; but is confident that it contains all that long-continued and thorough research, ripe scholarship, and eminent ability can discover and array on behalf of the priority of Strawbridge. Nevertheless the case for the priority of Embury seems to me too strong in positive chronological and documentary proof and corroborative circumstances to be overthrown.

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The "findings" of the Joint Commission constitute an amazingly indefinite verdict. They fix upon no positive date for any of Strawbridge's movements. They loosely give a choice of dates between two or more years for the formation of his society and the erection of his chapel. Even his coming to America is not ascribed to a particular year, but to "about the year 1761." No particular event is selected to stand for the origin of American Methodism, and no year is indicated as the sesquicentennial year. The series of assertions do not answer to the action of the General Conference instructing the Commission to determine the sesquicentennial year of American Methodism, but leaves the whole matter inconclusive.

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